

The Church of the Taxiarches at Gkoritsa, Lakonia

The Study of a Dedicatory Inscription and Its Context

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The small, cross-vaulted church of the Taxiarches is located southeast of Gkoritsa, a picturesque village situated approximately 22 km southeast of Sparta and 16 km northwest of Geraki in the foothills of Mount Parnon (Figs. 1 and 2). The church stands close to the ancient east–west road that ran from Sparta to Geraki, a location that is critical for understanding the building and its decoration.¹ The settlement of Geraki is visible from the east side of the church. A modern road—probably following the path of a medieval one (a late medieval or early modern, perhaps Ottoman, tower overlooks the approach)—connects the church with nearby Kalloni (Perpeni), the location of St. Nicholas, the site of a late twelfth-century monastery,² and Chrysapha, the setting of several important Byzantine churches.³ The Palaiomonastero near Vrontamas,

with paintings from 1201 and later, is located approximately 6.5 km southwest of Geraki.⁴ Deep ravines in the area preserve the vestiges of a large number of painted cave chapels; many, like Ai-Giannaki, in Ayioi Anargyroi (Zoupena), are inscribed with the names of supplicants.⁵ The church of the Taxiarches, then, was once located within a vibrant network of interconnected villages and monastic holdings.⁶

Despite its exceptional monumental decoration, the church of the Taxiarches remains largely

1 G. A. Pikoulas, *Το οδικό δίκτυο της Λακωνικής* (Athens, 2012), 167–73.

2 The tower is located 2 km east of Kalloni and 15 km from Geraki. See J. J. E. Hondius and M. A. Hondius-van Haefen, “Laconia, II, Notes on Topography,” *BSA* 24, suppl. (1919/1920–1920/1921): 144–50, at 145. For the church of St. Nicholas in Kalloni, see A. Kavvadia, “Ο Άγιος Νικόλαος της Κάλλονης,” in *Πρακτικά τοῦ Α΄ Τοπικοῦ Συνεδρίου Λακωνικῶν Μελετῶν*, Μολάοι 1982 = *Πελοποννησιακά*, Παράρτημα 9 (Athens, 1982–1983), 313–36; N. Drandakis, “Χριστιανικὰ ἐπιγραφὰι Λακωνικῆς,” *Ἀρχ.Ἑφ.* (1967): 137–77, at 165, n. 3.

3 For churches in Chrysapha, see N. Drandakis, “Παναγία ἢ Χρυσάφτισσα (1290),” in *Πρακτικά τοῦ Α΄ Τοπικοῦ Συνεδρίου Λακωνικῶν Μελετῶν*, 337–403; J. Albani, *Die byzantinischen Wandmalereien der Panagia Chrysaphitissa Kirche in Chrysapha, Lakonien*, Hefte zur byzantinischen Archäologie und Kunst 6 (Athens, 2000);

N. Drandakis, “Ο σταυροειδῆς ναὸς τοῦ Προδρόμου στὰ Χρύσαφα τῆς Λακεδαίμονος,” *Λακ.Σπ.* 9 (1988): 301–33; N. Drandakis, “Ο σπηλαιώδης ναὸς τοῦ Προδρόμου κοντὰ στὴ Χρύσαφα τῆς Λακεδαίμονος,” *Δελτ. Χριστ.Ἀρχ.Ἑτ.* 15 (1989–1990): 179–96.

4 N. Drandakis, “Το Παλιομονάστηρο του Βρονταμά,” *Ἀρχ.Δελτ.* 43 (1988): 159–94.

5 The late thirteenth-century cave chapel of Ai-Giannaki near Ayioi Anargyroi (Zoupena), between Gkoritsa and Geraki, preserves a graffito with the date 12 April 1719 and the name of the priest Panagiotakis Sigelas from Perpeni, attesting to premodern travel along this route. For this chapel, see N. Drandakis, “Ο σπηλαιώδης ναὸς τοῦ Αἰ-Γιαννάκη στὴ Ζούπενα,” *Δελτ.Χριστ.Ἀρχ.Ἑτ.* 13 (1985–1986): 79–92. For a study of cave chapels in the area, see L. Bender, *Ermitages et monastères rupestres byzantins de Laconie (Péloponnèse): Archéologie et paysages*, Studies in Historical Geography and Cultural Heritage, 4 (Novi Sad, 2022).

6 For monastic networks and painting in this region, see S. Gerstel, “Mapping the Boundaries of Church and Village: Ecclesiastical and Rural Landscapes in the Late Byzantine Peloponnese,” in *Viewing the Morea: Land and People in the Late Medieval Peloponnese*, ed. S. Gerstel (Washington, DC, 2013), 335–68.



Fig. 1. Church of the Taxiarches, Gkoritsa. Photo by author.

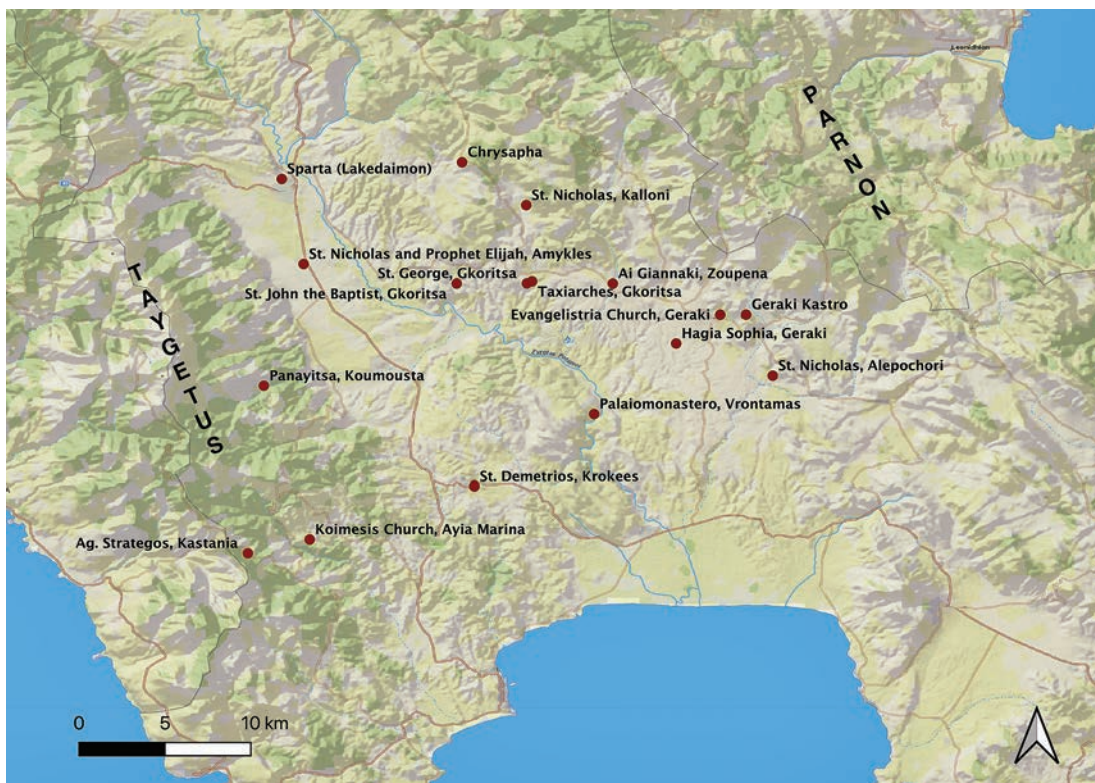


Fig. 2. Map of northern Lakonia with locations of churches and sites. Map by Sofia Pitouli.

unpublished.⁷ In this article, I offer the first reading of the church's dedicatory inscription (for a discussion of the epigraphy, see the Appendix),⁸ which provides the date of the decorative program, the names of the donors, the identities and place of origin of the painters, and the motivation for setting the building under the protection of the archangels Michael and Gabriel. Using information obtained from both the inscription and the painted program, I then analyze aspects of the church's decoration. The style of the paintings and many details of the imagery are rooted in Lakonia's rich artistic tradition. The decoration also, however, reflects interwoven cultural strands in this region, which had been under Frankish rule for approximately five decades before the church's construction. In addition, one element of the painting is of purely Western origin, suggesting that the painters imitated a feature seen on portable works or that artistic models were readily available to them. Finally, I place the church within a regional context, suggesting sources of inspiration for its painted decoration.

The Inscription

The inscription is located on the south wall of the nave immediately above the representation of St. John the Baptist and adjacent to the top of the masonry sanctuary

7 For the building's architecture, see G. Fouteris, "Εικονογραφικά προγράμματα σε βυζαντινούς σταυρεπίστεγους ναούς" (PhD diss., University of Thessaloniki, 2006), 136–38. For brief notices about its painted decoration, see A. Gkaiouri (Bakourou), "Συντήρηση τοιχογραφιών," *Αρχ.Δελτ.* 33, Χρ. Β'1 (1978): 105; A. Bakourou, "Τοιχογραφίες από δύο ασκηταριά της Λακωνίας," in *Πρακτικά του Α' Τοπικού Συνεδρίου Λακωνικών Μελετών*, 404–40, at 409, n. 6, 413, 415, 416; S. Koukariis, *Τὰ θαύματα—ἐμφανίσεις τῶν Ἀγγέλων καὶ Ἀρχαγγέλων στὴν βυζαντινὴ τέχνη τῶν Βαλκανίων* (Athens, 1989), 65; N. Drandakis, "Σχεδιάσμα καταλόγου των τοιχογραφημένων βυζαντινών και μεταβυζαντινών ναών της Λακωνίας," *Λακ.Σπ.* 13 (1996): 167–236, at 181. For preliminary observations about the painting, see A. Drandaki, "A Maniera Greca: Content, Context and Transformation of a Term," *Studies in Iconography* 35 (2014): 39–72, at 61–65; S. Gerstel and M. Kappas, "Between East and West: Locating Monumental Painting from the Peloponnese," in *Cross Cultural Interaction between Byzantium and the West, 1204–1669*, ed. A. Lymberopoulou (London, 2018), 175–202.

8 A description of the cleaning and conservation of the inscription by Thalia Papageorgiou and M. Totsis first appeared in *Archaiologikon Deltion*. According to the report, "Η ανάγνωση της επιγραφής, λόγω της κακής διατήρησής, παρουσιάζει αρκετά προβλήματα τα οποία προς το παρόν, δε βρήκαν τη λύση τους" (The reading of the inscription, because of its poor preservation, presents a number of problems that, for the moment, cannot be solved): *Αρχ.Δελτ.* 33, Χρ. Β'1 (1978): 105.

screen (Fig. 3). The lower frame of the inscription measures 2.47 m above the floor level. At this height and in this location, the framed text faces the upper part of the monumental Synaxis of the Archangels represented on the north wall. A dark red band, 5 cm in width, frames the inscription; a narrow white line forms a transition between the red band and the ochre background on which the text is painted (Figs. 4 and 5). The inscribed surface measures 0.25 × 0.62 m. The upper left corner of the band and the upper left corner of the inscription are damaged. The Greek Archaeological Service has consolidated the missing section of the wall surface, measuring approximately 0.27 × 0.29 m, with off-white mortar. The inscribed surface is extremely worn. Nine horizontal lines, scored freehand into the surface, roughly



Fig. 3. Church of the Taxiarches, Gkoritsa, St. John the Baptist and dedicatory inscription directly above him. Photo by author. (All photos reproduced by permission of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture—Ephorate of Antiquities of Lakonia.)

accord with divisions between the eleven lines of text; no horizontal is visible below line 2. The majuscule letters measure 1.2 to 1.5 cm in height. They are painted in a

dark, reddish-brown color. Despite surface losses to the paint, traces of many letters remain legible.⁹

The text can be reconstructed as follows:

-
- [- ? - † ἀνεκ] ἐνήστην · ἐκ · βάθ<ρο>ν · κ(αὶ) · ἀνισορίθουν · ὁ πάνσε-
 [πτος - ? -] κ(αὶ) πανάγιος · ναὸς · τῶν ἀρχαγγέλων(ν) · ταξιαρχό-
 [ν - ? -] ν · Μιχα(ήλ) κ(αὶ) · Γαβριήλ · διὰ πόθου πολλοῦ κ(αὶ) · ἐξόδου παρ' ἐμοῦ
 4 [- ? - Στε] φά·νου · κ(αὶ) · τῇ · σινζήγο · Χρυσίν(α)ς · κ(αὶ) · τῶ(ν) τέκνον · αὐτῶ-
 [ν - ? -] · ἐτούντες · τοὺς ἀρχαγγέλους · συχώ(ρ)υσην ἐν τῇ φοβαι-
 [ρᾱ- ? - κ(αὶ)] δικαίη κρίσιν · τοῦ ΟΥC τιχούν(-) δεξιᾶς κληροῦ Χ(ριστο)ῦ ·
 [- ? -] - ca. 3 - τ[ῆς] ἀπάσης Πελοποννήσ[ου] τῆς ΕΝΕΞΙΧΥΛΙΑCIN
 8 [- ? -] - ca. 2 - ΚΟΠΟ · Ετοῦ κ(αὶ) - ca. 2 - ΝΗ ΟΥΤΟΥΕΚΟΝ · κ(αὶ) · ΔΙ.Α.ΓΙΟΝΑ decoration
 [- ? -] · ε · Σεργίω ἱεροιογράφου ἐκ γῆς ζλαβοχορίου σί[ν] τῷ αὐταδέλ-
 φῳ αὐ[τ]οῦ Εὐσταθίου - Α- ca. 2 - CN- ca. 2 - EN- ca. 2 - μηνὴ Μαίρη· α' · ἔτος ,ζψξζ' · ἐν(δικτιῶνος) α'
 ΥΑΛ. ΡΑ κ(αὶ) ΨΕΥΕΟ
-

The all-venerable [and] all-holy church of the archangels, the Incorporeal Commanders Michael and Gabriel, was refurbished from the foundations and redecorated through the strong desire and contribution of [me, Ste]phanos, together with my spouse Christina and our children, beseeching the archangels for forgiveness in the terrifying Last Judgment and placing them at the right [hand] of Christ . . . of the entire Peloponnesos . . .

[by the hand of] the painter Sergios from the land of Stlavochorion together with his brother Eustathios . . .

May 1, the year 6766, the first indiction
 (chanters?) and . . .

The text is divided into three parts: (1) the dedication, the names of the donors, and an entreaty to the archangels (lines 1–8); (2) the names of the painters and the date of the church's completion (lines 9, 10); and (3) perhaps a request for chanters to pray (line 11). The first part of the text concludes with a decorative flourish (line 8), a feature often found at the end of poems.

The first section of the framed inscription is indented approximately 0.18 m (or about 15 letter spaces) from the vertical of the dark red band. Although I include in square brackets the possibility that lines 1–8 began at an unknown position to the left of the preserved text, my restoration of the openings of line 1 ([† ἀνεκ] ἐνήστην) and line 2 (πάνσε[πτος κ(αὶ)]) provide evidence that lines 1 and 2 began at a consistent vertical left edge positioned directly above the letter

theta of the name Eustathios in line 10, and the same appears to be true of lines 3–8.

In the second part of the text (lines 9 and 10), line 10, containing the name of a painter and the date, spans the entire width of the rectangle. The same may have been true for line 9. In many church inscriptions, the names of painters are differentiated from the rest of the text by a variation of letterforms or scale.¹⁰ Here, they are also differentiated by spanning the width of the framed space. The last line (line 11), the third part of the text, appears to be centered within the framed space but may have originally occupied the width of the rectangle; the surface is very worn, perhaps resulting from the removal of a later layer painted with a representation of the winged St. John the Baptist.¹¹

9 Infrared photography revealed traces of several letters that were not readily visible. I am grateful to the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lakonia for granting me permission to use this technique.

10 S. Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium: Art, Archaeology, and Ethnography* (Cambridge, 2015), 48.

11 Photo archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lakonia: Gkoritsa, Taxiarches, no. 5761.



Fig. 4.
Church of the
Taxiarches, Gkoritsa,
dedicatory inscription.
Photo by author.

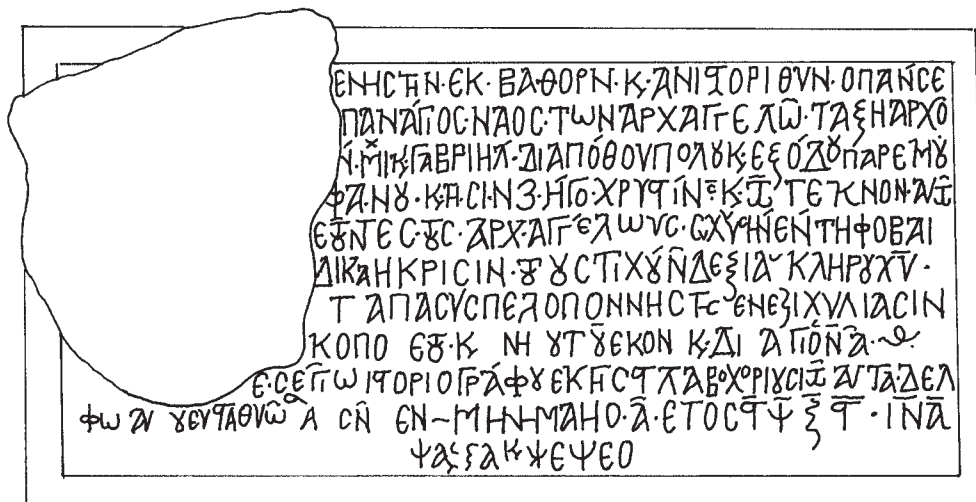


Fig. 5.
Church of the
Taxiarches, Gkoritsa,
drawing of dedicatory
inscription with
accents and midline
dots indicated.
Drawing by author.

Because of the damage to the wall, we cannot know whether the small, rectangular space to the left of lines 1–8 was filled with a diminutive image of the donor,¹²

12 A framed rectangle containing a small kneeling figure, Georgios, together with a supplicatory epigram, is found below the image of the Virgin Gorgoepekoos on the north wall of the north aisle of St. Stephen in Kastoria. The text begins to the right of the portrait. For the epigram, see A. Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken: Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung* 1, DenkWien 374, Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung 15 (Vienna, 2009), 180–81. For the image of the donor in the Church of St. Stephen, see N. Siomkos, *L'église Saint-Étienne à Kastoria: Étude*

a decorative design (whether an ornamental cross or another motif), or some other representation or text. Furthermore, we cannot ascertain whether this portion of the wall's surface—which also includes part of the framing band and the toes of two of the apostles from the scene of the Ascension—was intentionally excised. The red band is visible at the top and left side of the missing plaster. The damage to this section of the church's

des différentes phases du décor peint (X^e–XIV^e siècles) (Thessaloniki, 2005), 269–70. I am very grateful to Andreas Rhoby for suggesting this comparison.

Fig. 6.
Church of the Taxiarches,
Gkoritsa, dedicatory
inscription, right side of
lines 9, 10 with year.
Photo by author.



south wall is limited to this corner of the rectangle, although there is surface loss elsewhere in the church.

The Date of the Painted Church

According to the inscription, the church was completed on May 1, 6766 (= 1258), the first indiction (see above, Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). Consequently, the Taxiarches is one of the few churches in Lakonia securely dated to the mid-thirteenth century and within the period of Frankish rule. Study of the church's paintings—and in particular their more unusual features—must be set within a framework that considers artistic, cultural, and political developments in the region in this period. The confirmed date of the paintings now places this church within a small group of dated monuments that have been used to situate other, undated painted programs in Lakonia. Chronologically, the Gkoritsa paintings are bracketed between the first phase of decoration in the nearby Palaiomonastero close to Vrontamas (1201),¹³ and paintings in the church of Hagioi Anargyroi in

Kepoula (1265) and Sts. Theodore in Kaphiona (1263–1271), both in distant Mani.¹⁴ The church of Hagia Triada in Kranidi, dated to 1244, is close in date to the Taxiarches, but outside of Lakonia.¹⁵ Critical to the understanding of the church's decoration is the painting of the Evangelistria church in Geraki, which most scholars have dated to the end of the twelfth century.¹⁶ Considering the small number of securely dated churches in the region, the examination of the Gkoritsa inscription and paintings provides an opportunity to investigate mid-thirteenth-century monumental decoration in Lakonia, and specifically decoration carried out by Orthodox painters for Orthodox patrons during the time of Latin rule.

14 N. Drandakis, *Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες της Μέσα Μάνης* (Athens, 1995), 64–100, 307–39.

15 S. Kalopissi-Verti, *Die Kirche der Hagia Triada bei Kranidi in der Argolis (1244)*, *Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia* 20 (Munich, 1975).

16 See N. Moutsopoulos and G. Demetrokallis, *Ιεράκι: Οι εκκλησίες του οικισμού* (Thessaloniki, 1981), 135–36 (with earlier bibliography). Recently, however, Anna Takoumi has suggested that the painting be dated to the first decades of the thirteenth century. A. Takoumi, “Η πρόσληψη των ιστορικών συνθηκών στην τέχνη της Πελοποννήσου κατά την υστεροβυζαντινή περίοδο με βάση τη μνημειακή ζωγραφική, τις επιγραφές και τις παραστάσεις των δωρητών: η περίπτωση της Λακωνίας (1204–1349)” (PhD diss., National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 2020), 169–203.

13 According to Nikolaos Drandakis, the paintings are dated to the twelfth century, the year 1201, the fourteenth century, and the sixteenth century. See Drandakis, “Το Παλιμονάστηρο του Βρονταμά,” 159–94. For another view on the dating of the church, see S. Gerstel, “Art and Identity in the Medieval Morea,” in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, ed. A. Laiou and R. Mottahedeh (Washington, DC, 2001), 263–85, at 275, n. 74.



Fig. 7.
Church of the Taxiarches,
Gkoritsa, Synaxis of the
Archangels. Photo by author.

The Dedication of the Church

Stephanos and Christina,¹⁷ the donors named in the fourth line of the inscription, built the Taxiarches as a votive offering, and most likely as their intended place of burial. One local source reports that a grave was found outside the church during the restoration

of the building by the archaeological service;¹⁸ this discovery is not included in any of the brief published reports. The inscription, containing an impassioned entreaty to the archangels, is appropriately placed in a church intended to receive supplicatory prayers in the founders' lifetimes and commemorations following their deaths. The looming representation of the Synaxis of the Archangels on the north wall offers a painted response to the inscription and manifests the figures' formal role as intercessors (Fig. 7).

The position of the archangels as protectors and psychopomps undergirds the dedication to the heavenly commanders of this church and others in the

17 The name Christina, although uncommon, appears in several Late Byzantine sources. See *PLP* 30999–31001. The baptismal name Stephanos is shared with Stephanos the First Martyr, represented in the church's sanctuary, and by an early bishop of Sparta whose tomb and mosaic epitaph were discovered in excavations at 34 Kleomvrotos Street. See A. Bakourou, "Το 'κυμητήριον' του Επισκόπου Στεφάνου και τοπογραφικές παρατηρήσεις για την παλαιοχριστιανική Λακεδαιμονία," *Αρχ.Δελτ.* 44–46 (1989–1991): 335–60.

18 I thank Panagiotes Konstandakis, president of the village of Gkoritsa, for information about this burial.

region. Close to Gkoritsa is the mid-thirteenth-century church of St. Athanasios in Geraki, which was originally dedicated to the Taxiarches, as Eleni Kounoupiotou-Manolessou has persuasively argued.¹⁹ In Lakonia, painted churches dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel, the Asomatoi, or the Taxiarches are found in the region of Geraki and throughout the Mani.²⁰ In the last centuries of Byzantium, the construction of a large number of churches in the name of the archangels was part of a general upsurge in dedications to saints who afforded holy protection for both the living and the dead.²¹

Aside from ecclesiastical dedications, the painted programs of many churches in Lakonia contain monumental representations of the Synaxis of the Archangels, a composition most frequently placed on the north wall of the nave, as at Gkoritsa.²² Although some

scholars have viewed the Synaxis as a proclamation of Orthodoxy in regions ruled by Latins,²³ the intention behind the Gkoritsa representation is clearly articulated in the facing inscription, which implores the archangels “for forgiveness in the terrifying Last Judgment.” In addition to the Synaxis, the church of the Taxiarches contains the depiction of the Miracle at Chonai in the upper register of the south wall of the cross arm, that is, opposite and above the representation of the Synaxis (Fig. 8). This scene is frequently represented in churches in Lakonia, including several in and near Geraki.²⁴ Related to these depictions is the image of the Archangel Michael ὁ Φύλαξ (the Guardian),²⁵ which is found in several churches close to Gkoritsa, including

19 The church of St. Athanasios is associated with Geraki's modern cemetery. See E. Kounoupiotou-Manolessou, “Νέες τοιχογραφίες στὸ Γεράκι,” *XV^η CEB* IIA (Athens, 1981), 305–24, at 320. See also Moutsopoulos and Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι*, 139.

20 For Geraki, see G. Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι: Οι τοιχογραφίες των ναών του κάστρου* (Athens, 2001), 162–81. The late thirteenth-century cave chapel of St. John the Forerunner in Vassaras, close to Geraki, was originally dedicated to the Taxiarches or to the Archangel Michael. See Bakourou, “Τοιχογραφίες από δύο ασκηταριά της Λακωνίας,” 416. For Ag. Strategos, Mariorema, close to Geraki, see N. Drandakis, “The Chapel of Ai-Strategos at Mariorema,” *Δελτ.Χριστ. Αρχ.Ετ.* 17 [1994]: 223–30. For churches in the Mani dedicated to the Archangels in Phlomochori, Panoros (Lagia), stou Kalou, Charouda, Soulia (Triantaphyllia), Glezou, Kouloumi, Polemitas, Kako Bouno (Koita), Keria, Diporo (Ano Boularioi), Alyka, and Tsikalía, see, respectively, Drandakis, “Σχεδιάσμα,” nos. 265, 288, 368, 379, 381, 384, 390, 401, 413, 438, 445, 448, 458, with preliminary bibliography.

21 Gerstel, “Art and Identity,” 272.

22 See the partially preserved representation on the north wall of the late thirteenth-century cave chapel of St. John the Baptist (originally dedicated to the Archangel Michael), Vassaras, Lakonia (Bakourou, “Τοιχογραφίες από δύο ασκηταριά της Λακωνίας,” 414–17); St. Nicholas, Geraki (Moutsopoulos and Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι*, 57); St. John Chrysostom, Geraki (Moutsopoulos and Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι*, 26); St. Nikon, Xerokampi (Drandakis, “Σχεδιάσμα,” 182, no. 79); Ag. Strategos, Mariorema (image unpublished; for the church, see N. Drandakis, “Ο Αἰ-Στράτηγος στὸ Μαριόρεμα,” *Δελτ.Χριστ. Αρχ.Ετ.* 17 [1993–1994]: 223–30); St. Nicholas, Vlachioti (S. Koukiaris, “Ο Άγ. Νικόλαος στοῦ Βλαχιώτη,” in *Ἀντίφωνον ἀφιέρωμα στὸν καθηγητὴ Ν. Β. Δρανδάκη*, ed. V. Katsaros [Thessaloniki, 1994], 246–56, at 254). In Mani, see Sts. Theodore near Kaphiona (P. Katsafados, “New Epigraphic Evidence from Mani,” *Δελτ.Χριστ. Αρχ.Ετ.* 38 [2017]: 302–9); St. Peter, Palaiochora (thirteenth century; associated with the modern-day cemetery) (Drandakis, *Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες της Μέσα Μάνης*, 63, fig. 10, 64); St. Theodore, Tsopakas (late thirteenth

century) (Drandakis, *Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες της Μέσα Μάνης*, 51); and Taxiarches at Gklezou (personal observation). In Epidauros Limera, see Hag. Strategos in Ayios Nikolaos (on the south wall; mid-thirteenth century) (N. Gkioles, “Ο ναὸς τοῦ Αἰ-Στράτηγου στὸν Ἅγιο Νικόλαο Μονεμβασίας,” *Λακ.Σπ.* 9 [1988]: 423–62, at 426, 442). Outside of Lakonia, the representation is found in the portico of the Church of Hag. Strategos outside of Kastania, Messenian Mani, dated by an inscription to 1194 (M. Kappas, “Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αἰ Στράτηγου παρὰ την Καστάνια της Μεσσηνιακῆς Μάνης,” in *Ἀρχονταρχία, ἀφιέρωμα στὸν Εὐθύμιο Ν. Τσιγαρίδα*, ed. Eleni Kotsou [Athens, 2021], 231–54); and Hagia Triada, Kranidi (1244) (Kalopissi-Verti, *Kranidi*, pl. 22).

23 See Kalopissi-Verti, *Kranidi*, 192: “Im Bild der Synaxis der Erzengel vereinigen sich also die Lehren der Souveränität Christi, der Verehrung seiner Imago und des Triumphes der Orthodoxie.”

24 See the thirteenth-century cave chapel of St. John the Baptist (originally dedicated to the Archangel Michael), Vassaras, Lakonia (Bakourou, “Τοιχογραφίες από δύο ασκηταριά της Λακωνίας,” 414–17), the thirteenth-century paintings in St. Athanasios, Geraki (originally dedicated to the Archangel Michael) (Moutsopoulos and Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι*, 169), and the late fourteenth-century paintings in the Taxiarches outside of the *kastro* of Geraki (Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι*, 162–88; M. Soteriou, “Η πρώτη παλαιολόγειος αναγέννησις εἰς τὰς χώρας καὶ τὰς νήσους τῆς Ἑλλάδος κατὰ τὸν 13ον αἰῶνα,” *Δελτ.Χριστ. Αρχ.Ετ.* 4 [1964–1965]: 257–76, at 265; J. Papageorgiou, “Τοιχογραφίες του 15ου αἰῶνα στο Κάστρο Γερακίου: ἓνα τοπικὸ ζωγραφικὸ ἐργαστήριον τῆς ὀψίμης Παλαιολόγειας περιόδου στὴ Λακωνία,” in “Sparta and Laconia from Prehistory to Pre-Modern,” *British School at Athens Studies* 16 (2009): 361–67). In Mani, the representation appears in the fourteenth-century church of the Archangel Michael at Panoros, near the village of Lagia (N. Drandakis et al., “Ἐρεῦνα στὴν Μάνη,” *Πρακτ. Αρχ.Ετ.* [1978]: 261–325, at 279–82).

25 St. Nicholas, Geraki (Moutsopoulos and Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι*, 57, fig. 94); Virgin Chrysaphitissa, Chrysapha (Albani, *Panagia Chrysaphitissa Kirche*, 36); Phaneromeni *katholikon*, Mani (P. Katsafados, “A Remarkable Portrait of an Early Fourteenth Century Byzantine Iconographic Program in the Inner Mani,” *Λακ.Σπ.* 22 [2020]: 627–46). On this subject, see A. Xyngopoulos, “Ἀρχάγγελος Μιχαὴλ ὁ Φύλαξ,” *BNJ* 10 (1934): 184; M. G. Soteriou,



Fig. 8. Church of the Taxiarches, Gkoritsa, Miracle at Chonai. Photo by author.

the Evangelistria in Geraki and the Palaiomonastero near Vrontamas.²⁶ In the Vrontamas church, the archangels Michael and Gabriel guard the entrance to the church. Michael is labeled *ἐξορινός* (beyond limits), while Gabriel is accompanied by a text that derives from Psalm 45 (46):5: *ὁ Χριστὸς ἐν μέσῳ ἡμῶν κ(αὶ) οὐ σαλευθήσεται*, asserting that Christ is in our midst.²⁷ These manifestations of the presence and power of the archangels is related to their role as intercessors for those

who commissioned the churches and their decoration and also for those who entered the building in faith.

Supplicatory prayers inscribed next to the angelic figures in Lakonian churches further illuminate their role as intercessors. In the church of the Archangel Michael in Diporo (Ano Boularioi), Mani, an inscription from 1274/75 to the left of the archangel identifies the donors who added a new layer of paint to the church's twelfth-century decoration.²⁸ In St. Barbara in Eremos, Mani, a painted inscription next to the archangel furnishes the names of two brothers and inventories the fields they provided for the church's upkeep.²⁹

²⁶ “Αἱ τοιχογραφίαι τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ ναυδρίου τῶν Ταξιαρχῶν Δεσφίνης,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έπ.* 3 (1962–1963): 175–202, at 177.

²⁶ In the Evangelistria, the image of the archangel fills a blind arch at the west end of the south wall of the church. See Moutsopoulos and Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι*, 92 (without illustration). For the archangels at Vrontamas, see Drandakis, “Το Παλιμονάστηρο του Βρονταμά,” 183.

²⁷ The psalm text reads *ὁ Θεὸς ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῆς καὶ οὐ σαλευθήσεται* (“God is in her midst; she shall not be moved”). The text has been altered by the painter to refer to “Christ” rather than “God.”

²⁸ Drandakis, *Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες της Μέσα Μάνης*, 458, 460.

²⁹ D. Charalambous, “Ο τοιχογραφικός διάκοσμος του ναοῦ της Αγ. Βαρβάρας στην Ερημο Μάνης,” in *Επιστημονικό Συμπόσιο στη μνήμη Νικολάου Β. Δρανδάκη για τη Βυζαντινή Μάνη, Πρακτικά*, ed. E. Eleutheriou and A. Mexia (Sparta, 2008–2009), 197–212; P. Katsafados, *Βυζαντινές επιγραφικές μαρτυρίες στη Μέσα Μάνη (13ος–14ος αι.)* (Athens, 2015), 176–78.

In the late thirteenth-century church of St. Theodore in Tsopakas, Mani, a supplicatory inscription is painted between the heads of the angelic figures.³⁰ In St. John Chrysostom in Geraki, an epigram painted adjacent to the representation of the Synaxis of the Archangels, dated ca. 1450, entreats the archangels to mediate “so that we will be found worthy of salvation.”³¹ Another supplicatory inscription in Geraki, in the so-called Anonymous Church, from ca. 1400, in the *kastro*, the old acropolis, is painted between the feet of the archangels. The only words that can be securely read are δούλου τοῦ Θεοῦ (of the servant of God).³²

The last, centered line of the Gkoritsa text contains the letter string ΨΑΛ. ΡΑ, which may be read as a request for chanters to offer commemorations on behalf of the donors. Such requests are common in dedicatory inscriptions in Lakonia. They can be seen in the earlier carvings of Niketas, a sculptor who worked in the Mani in the eleventh century. An inscription of 1075 carved onto a marble tie beam in Sts. Theodore, Vamvaka, is representative of the kind of text requesting chanted performances. The deeply chiseled words voice a request to the Lord to “remember your servant Leo and his wife and child,” who were responsible for commissioning the sculpted architectural supports. The text then requests that chanters pray for the supplicant: ἡ ψάλλοντες εὐχεσθε ἡπὲρ αὐτοῦ.³³ The eleventh-century inscription in Hagia Triada, Langada, in Messenian Mani, asks the chanters to pray during the night and the day: ἡ ψάλλοντες δηὰ τὸ(ν) θ(εὸ)ν εὐχεσθε αὐτοὺς νικτὶ κ(αί) ἐν ἡμέρα.³⁴ Requests for prayers and chants continued into the thirteenth century. In the church of the Archangel Michael in Polemitas, Mani, dated to 1278, the last line

of the dedicatory inscription asks the readers to pray for those commemorated.³⁵

As with many burial churches, the Taxiarches also contains a large number of images concerned with healing, offering protection during the founders’ lives.³⁶ The Miracle at Chonai, prominently represented in the upper register of the south wall, emphasizes the healing river and the Archangel Michael’s role in effecting cures of both body and spirit (see above, Fig. 8).³⁷ Saints Cosmas and Damian are represented below the Evangelists John and Matthew; two additional healing saints, probably Panteleimon and Hermolaos (an older figure with white hair and a divided beard), are depicted below Luke and Mark. St. Cyrus, holding a glass vial in his covered left hand, is represented on the intrados of the north arch of the sanctuary.³⁸ The young saint depicted opposite him should be identified as John, the saint with whom he is typically paired. The healing saint Romanos Sklepodioktes, depicted on the west wall to the south of the door, holds a surgical instrument in his right hand.³⁹ Finally, the representation of St. Nikon, on the west wall of the blind arch below the Miracle at Chonai, witnesses the proliferation of his veneration in the region, which was fueled by healing miracles at his shrine.⁴⁰

30 Drandakis, *Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες της Μέσα Μάνης*, 51.

31 K. Zesios, “Ἐπιγραφαὶ χριστιανικῶν χρόνων τῆς Ἑλλάδος: Α' Λακεδαιμόνος,” *Βυζαντίς* 1 (1909): 114–45, at 136; Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme*, 1:224–26. An illustration of this Synaxis of the Archangels is included in Moutsopoulos and Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι*, 224, color plate 6 (without commentary).

32 Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι*, 93, 96 fig. 86, and personal observation. The inscription appears to be four lines in length.

33 Similar inscriptions are found in Mani in St. Nicholas, Melea; Sts. Theodore, Kaphiona; St. Philip, Ano Poula; and St. John, Keria. See N. Drandakis, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης* (Athens, 2002), 3, 19, 27, 34, 50.

34 Drandakis, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, 47.

35 S. Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits in Thirteenth-Century Churches of Greece* (Vienna, 1992), 72.

36 Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes*, 151–69.

37 See Koukiales, *Τα θαύματα-εμφανίσεις των αγγέλων*, 40–41, 65. On the archangel’s curative powers, see also S. Gabeliç, “The Archangelos Xorinos, or the Banisher,” *DOP* 50 (1996): 345–60.

38 Similar representations of St. Cyrus are found in the Evangelistria and in St. John Chrysostom, Geraki. See Moutsopoulos and Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι*, 19, fig. 35; 108, fig. 167.

39 I. Anagnostakis and T. Papamastorakis, “St. Romanos *epi ten sklepan*: A Saint Protector and Healer of Horses,” in *Animals and Environment in Byzantium (7th–12th c.)*, ed. I. Anagnostakis, T. Kollias, and E. Papadopoulou (Athens, 2011), 137–64, discusses churches in the region, including the Taxiarches, with the representation of the saint. See also Drandaki, “A Maniera Greca,” 61. To these should be added a half-length representation in the church of St. George in Karinia, Mani (1281) with the partially preserved (and misspelled) inscription “[ΣΚΛΕ]ΠΟΔΕΟΚΤΗΣ” (personal observation). For representations of the saint, see also N. Pyrrou, “Θεραπευτής και πεταλωτής: Νέα στοιχεία για τον Ρωμανό το Σκλεποδιώτη από τη μνημειακή ζωγραφική της Κρήτης,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έτ.* 34 (2013): 167–78.

40 For Nikon, see A. Takoumi, “The Use of the Past in Late Byzantine Reality: The Promotion of the 10th-Century Saint

Prominent among the figures in the church is St. Anne, who is represented on the east face of the blind arch framing the Synaxis of the Archangels. She is depicted in full length and holding the infant Virgin. She faces her husband, Joachim, who is painted on the west face of the blind arch. The healing saints are represented above them. In many churches, the representation of Anne can be linked to the donors' desires for conception.⁴¹ At Gkoritsa, Anne is one of nine female figures represented in the small church, including full-length depictions of Sts. Catherine and Marina, as well as other female saints in half-length, including St. Barbara and, most likely, Sts. Paraskeve and Kyriake.

The Painters Sergios and Eustathios

The inscription clearly identifies the *ἱερογράφοι* as Sergios and his brother Eustathios, adding their names to the list of painters who worked in Lakonia in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.⁴² The hands of the two painters are easily differentiated. Sergios, the lead painter, executed the monumental figures in the lower register—the Synaxis of the Archangels (see above, Fig. 7), equestrian St. George (see below, Fig. 25), devotional images on the masonry icon screen, full-length saints in the sanctuary and side walls, and half-length saints in the arches, for example, Cosmas and

Damian. Within the narrative cycle, Sergios painted the scenes of the Crucifixion, Deposition (see below, Fig. 24), and Anastasis, which contain elongated figures who display emotional intensity through their furrowed eyebrows or facial expressions. The Synaxis of the Archangels and the Miracle at Chonai feature similar treatment of the archangel's hair and the rendering of the outer side of his wings, revealing the hand of the same painter (see above, Figs. 7 and 8). Sergios pays close attention to facial features; the upper lids of the eyes are extended and the arched brows are connected to the bridges of the long noses. Gazes are spiritual and remote. Ears are carefully drawn. The hands are graceful and the fingers elongated.

Eustathios painted the narrative scenes of the cross vault (Nativity, Presentation in the Temple, Raising of Lazarus, Entry into Jerusalem) (Fig. 9), the west vault (Transfiguration, Arrest of Christ), and the upper registers of the walls (Annunciation, Pentecost) (see below, Fig. 20). His figures are proportionately shorter and their faces rounder. Their features are thicker, with deeply shaded mouths. He uses white paint to create dramatic shading effects. Unlike Sergios, who differentiates individual strands of hair and frequently paints wisps descending over the forehead, Eustathios creates sections of hair that are often divided into thick tufts which look almost cartoonish (Fig. 10). In some of the narrative scenes, including the Presentation in the Temple, Dormition, and Ascension, Sergios's hand is evident in the painting of several figures. In the Ascension, Sergios painted Christ being supported by angels; his brother Eustathios executed six of the apostles. The two collaborated on other details within the program. Both the white horse that St. George rides and the donkey supporting Christ in the Entry into Jerusalem were painted by the same hand (see Fig. 9, and below, Fig. 25). The animals have expressive facial features, articulated joints, and similarly narrow legs.

Eustathios delights in decorative details of clothing, textiles, and furnishings. Jeweled bands—like the outline of the halo of the Archangel Michael in the Synaxis—frame the opening of the tomb from which Lazarus emerges (see Fig. 9), the borders of the bench on which the apostles sit in the Pentecost, and the chairs of the evangelists. His representations of the evangelists include accurate details of wooden lecterns with torchon screw bases, pen cases, pen sharpeners, glass ink

Nikon 'the Metanoieite' as Equal-to-the-Apostles on the Laconian Churches, Peloponnese (13th–14th Centuries)," *Δελτ.Χριστ.Αρχ.Ετ.* 43 (2022): 143–58; N. Drandakis, "Εικονογραφία τοῦ ὁσίου Νίκωνος," *Πελοποννησιακά* 5 (1962): 306–19 (for a preliminary list of churches containing the image); R. Morris, "The Spread of the Cult of St. Nikon 'Metanoieite,'" in *Οἱ ἥρωες τῆς ὁρθόδοξης ἐκκλησίας: οἱ νέοι ἅγιοι 805–1605 αἰώνας*, *Εθνικό Ἰδρυμα Ἑρευνών-Ἰνστιτούτο Βυζαντινῶν Ἑρευνῶν-Διεθνή Συμπόσια*, 15, ed. E. Kountoura-Galaki (Athens, 2004), 433–58; M. Kaplan, "La fondation de Nikôn le Métanoieite à Sparte: Un monastère urbain, sa ville et sa campagne," in *Puer Apuliae: Mélanges offerts à Jean-Marie Martin*, ed. E. Cuozzo et al. (Paris, 2008), 2:383–93.

41 S. Gerstel, "Painted Sources for Female Piety in Medieval Byzantium," *DOP* 52 (1998): 89–111.

42 Examples of family members working together to complete church commissions are discussed in S. Kalopissi-Verti, "Painters' Information on Themselves in Late Byzantine Church Inscriptions," in *L'artista a Bisanzio e nel mondo cristiano-orientale*, ed. M. Bacchi (Pisa, 2007), 55–70, at 62–63.



Fig. 9. Church of the Taxiarches, Gkoritsa, cross vault with Raising of Lazarus, Entry into Jerusalem, decorative band. Photo by author.



Fig. 10. Church of the Taxiarches, Gkoritsa, Ascension (detail of St. Peter). Photo by author.



Fig. 11. Church of the Taxiarches, Gkoritsa, Evangelist Mark. Photo by author.

bottles,⁴³ and dragon-shaped brackets (*drakontaria*) from which lamps (with wickholders) are suspended from chains⁴⁴ (Fig. 11). In contrast to the elegant, yet solitary evangelists represented in the earlier Evangelistria Church in Geraki, the Gkoritsa figures inhabit a building-filled landscape.

43 A. C. Antonaras, "Early Christian and Byzantine Glass Vessels: Forms and Uses," in *Byzanz—das Römerreich im Mittelalter*, part 1, *Welt der Ideen, Welt der Dinge*, ed. F. Daim and J. Drauschke (Mainz, 2010), 383–430, at 406.

44 Nine dragon-shaped brackets with their chains and ten other dragon-shaped brackets without chains are inventoried in the typikon of Gregory Pakourianos for the Monastery of the Mother of God Petritzonitissa in Bačkovo, dated December 1083. See *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, ed. J. Thomas and A. Constantinides Hero, 5 vols. (Washington, DC, 2000), 2:554, 559, n. 58. For a similarly shaped bronze hanging bowl used in Lakodaimon at the time of the construction of the Taxiarches, see G. B. Waywell et al., "Excavations at Sparta: The Roman Stoa, 1988–91, Part 3," *BSA* 92 (1997): 401–34, at 401–3.

From the Land of Stlavochorion (ἐκ γῆς σλαβοχορίου)

The inscription ἐκ γῆς σλαβοχορίου provides evidence that the painter Sergios originated from the village of Stlavochorion (early modern Slavochori/Sklavochori; modern Amykles) (see above, Figs. 2 and 5, and Fig. 12),⁴⁵ located 12 km west of Gkoritsa on the national road connecting Sparta and Gytheion.⁴⁶ Today, one reaches Gkoritsa from Amykles by crossing the Evrotas River at Skoura. From there, the ascent to the village passes through the village of Kephala. Medieval travelers may have followed a similar route.⁴⁷ The inscription's spelling of Stlavochorion captures the aural perception of the village's name and preserves the linguistic residue of a Slavophone population. The same village, with a variant spelling, is mentioned in the *Testament* of St. Nikon Metanoiete, which refers to the *metochia* of the Monastery of the Savior in Stlavochorion and Parori.⁴⁸ The text lists the agricultural holdings of the metochia, which included vines,

45 An alternate spelling for Stlavochorion is S[k]lavochorion. Several painted inscriptions of the thirteenth century in Lakonia make reference to their painter's place of origin: ἀπὸ χώρας Ρετζητζα(ς), in Hagioi Anargyroi, Kepoula, Mani (1265) (Drandakis, "Οἱ τοιχογραφίες των Αγ. Αναργύρων Κηπούλας," *Αρχ.Ἐφ.* 1980: 97–118, at 99–102; Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions*, 67–69); χώρ(ας) τ(ῆς) Ἀγί(ας) Θέκλης, in the Church of the Archangel Michael, Polemitas, Mani (1278) (N. Drandakis, "Δύο ἐπιγραφές ναῶν τῆς Λακωνίας: τοῦ Μιχαὴλ Ἀρχαγγέλου (1278) στὸν Πολεμίτα τῆς Μάνης καὶ τῆς Χρυσοφίτισσας (1290)," *Λακ.Σπ.* 6 [1982], 44–61; Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions*, 71–75).

46 For a history of the village, see S. P. Antonakos, *Ἀμύκλαι* (Athens, 1982). I am grateful to Paula Antonakos-Boswell and Takis Mazis for providing me with copies of the book.

47 Pikoulas, *Τὸ οδικὸ δίκτυο τῆς Λακωνικῆς*, 168–73. On bridges in the area of Sparta, see P. Armstrong, W. G. Cavanagh and G. Shipley, "Crossing the River: Observations on Routes and Bridges in Laconia from the Archaic to Byzantine Periods," *BSA* 87 (1992): 293–310.

48 "Ὅλα τὰ εἰσοδίσματα τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν ὅπου ἔκτισα τοῦ σθλαβοχορίου, καὶ παρωρίου, ἤγουν τὰ Μετόχια ἀντάμα μὲ ταῖς εἰσοδίαις των, νὰ ἀπὸ θησαυρίζωνται, καὶ νὰ μαζώνωνται εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ σωτήρος (Let all the revenues of the churches of Stlavochorion and Parorion, which I built, that is, the metochia along with their incomes, be stored and collected in the church of the Savior). See O. Lampsidis, *Ὁ ἐκ Πόντου ὁσιος Νίκων ὁ μετανοεῖτε (Κείμενα-Σχόλια)* (Athens, 1982), 255, lines 131–32. See also P. Armstrong, "The Monasteries of Saint Nikon: The Amyklaion, Sparta, and Lakonia," in *Dioskouroi: Studies Presented to W. G. Cavanagh and C. B. Mee on the Anniversary of their 30-Year Joint Contribution to Aegean Archaeology*, ed. C. Gallou, M. Georgiadis and G. M. Muskett, BAR International Series, 1889 (Oxford, 2008), 352–69.

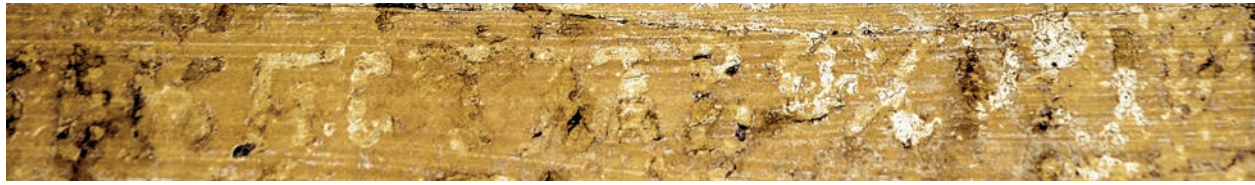


Fig. 12. Church of the Taxiarches, Gkoritsa, dedicatory inscription, line 9: “Land of Stlavochorion” (ἐκ γῆς ζλαβοχορίου). Photo by author.

fields, olive trees, and other fruit-bearing and non-fruit-bearing trees.⁴⁹ The *Testament* additionally mentions a man from Stlavochorion who promises the saint four bushels of lime.⁵⁰ The source describes the village as an agricultural setting with easy access to limestone and water. In fact, this is the case. The ancient temples of Apollo Amyklaios and Alexandra/Kassandra offered architectural spolia for the construction of the medieval churches in the village and potentially their dressed stone as a source of lime.⁵¹

The stated connection of Sergios to Stlavochorion urges us to investigate whether he and his brother played a role in the decoration of two unpublished churches in the village of Amykles that also preserve thirteenth-century monumental painting: St. Nicholas and Prophet Elijah (Profitis Elias).

The Church of St. Nicholas in Amykles (Stlavochorion)

St. Nicholas, in the neighborhood of Kokkineika at the village center of Amykles, is a small, single-aisle

church with a vaulted ceiling.⁵² Thirteenth-century paintings are preserved in the upper registers of the walls and vault, as well as in the sanctuary. As at the church of the Taxiarches, the sanctuary includes the Virgin Kecharitomene in the conch of the apse and the concelebrating hierarchs Basil and John Chrysostom in the lower register. At the center of the apse of St. Nicholas, below the window, are two small angels dressed as deacons and extending *rhipidia*. These figures flanked the small image of the sacrificed Christ, the *thyomenos* or *melismos*, which is no longer preserved. In the lower register of the east wall, to either side of the apse, is the Annunciation, with the Archangel Gabriel approaching the standing Virgin across the space of the altar table. Above the figures of the Annunciation are small medallions containing images of Joachim and Anne. In the upper register of the east wall of the church and extending onto the east end of the vault is the scene of the Ascension. A decorative band running east–west bisects the vault of the nave. Narrow red bands running perpendicular to it divide the eight narrative scenes (Fig. 13).⁵³ The scenes on the north side of the vault are (east to west) the Dormition of the Virgin, the Presentation in the Temple, Christ and the Samaritan Woman, and the

49 Τόσον εἰσόδιμα τῶν Ἀμπελίων, καὶ χοραφίων, καὶ ἐλαιῶν, ὅσον ἔμπασμα δένδρων καρπερῶν, καὶ ἀκάρπων (Not only the yield of the vineyards and small farms and olive trees, but also the yield of fruit-bearing and not fruit-bearing trees). See Lampsidis, *Ο ἐκ Πόντου ὁσιος Νίκων*, 255.

50 A. Bandy, “Nikon Metanoiete: Testament of Nikon the Metanoiete for the Church and Monastery of the Savior, the Mother of God, and St. Kyriake in Lacedaimon,” in Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 1:318.

51 Pamela Armstrong suggests that the source may have been the sanctuary of Apollo Amyklaios. Spolia from the ancient site were incorporated into the church of St. Kyriake at the site of the Amyklaion and also into Byzantine churches in Amykles. See Armstrong, “The Monasteries of Saint Nikon,” 363. Byzantine churches also contain spolia from the sanctuary of Alexandra/Kassandra (Paus. 3.19.6), located near the church of St. Paraskeve on the outskirts of the village. For information on this sanctuary, see G. Salapata, “Myth into Cult: Alexandra/Kassandra in Lakonia,” in *Oikistes: Studies in Constitution, Colonies, and Military Power in the Ancient World; Offered in Honor of A. J. Graham*, ed. V. B. Gorman and E. Robinson (Leiden, 2006), 131–59 (with collected bibliography).

52 Much of the church was repainted between 1874 and 1878, including the sanctuary screen and the figures in the blind arches at the east end of the lateral walls. I am very grateful to Father Eusebios Mitris and Maria Kokkinakou, who accompanied me to the church over several visits. The church’s internal dimensions are 5.90 × 2.05 m. See *Αρχ. Δελτ.* 37, Xp. B’1 [1982]: 127, which records the cleaning and restoration of the paintings and asserts that the church, dated to the end of the thirteenth century, is by the same painters as Prophet Elijah in the same village. The surface of the paintings in St. Nicholas is extremely worn. For a brief discussion of the church, see Antonakos, *Αμύνλαι*, 204–8.

53 The scene of the Annunciation at the east end of the south side is a nineteenth-century layer that covers the thirteenth-century Nativity.



Fig. 13. Church of St. Nicholas, Amykles, ornamental band at center of vault. Photo by author.



Fig. 14. Church of St. Nicholas, Amykles, St. Eustathios. Photo by author.



Fig. 15. Church of St. Nicholas, Amykles, detail of Raising of Lazarus with Mary, Martha, and hooded figure. Photo by author.



Fig. 16. Church of the Taxiarches, Gkoritsa, detail of the Betrayal with hooded figure. Photo by author.

Anastasis.⁵⁴ On the south side of the vault are (east to west) the later, nineteenth-century Annunciation, followed by thirteenth-century scenes of the Nativity, Transfiguration, Raising of Lazarus, and Entry into Jerusalem.⁵⁵ Below the narrative scenes, forming a transition between the vaults and the lower register of the side walls, are rows of medallions containing busts of saints. Although most can no longer be identified, portraits of St. Theodore and St. Demetrios are found on the north wall. On the south wall, medallions include images of St. Nikon Metanoiete and St. Eustathios, labeled Ευσταθιος (Fig. 14). The blind arches at the west side of the church still retain traces of Byzantine paintings. On the south wall, the Baptism is damaged; only the halo and legs of Christ and the halo and one wing of the attending angel are preserved. On the north wall is the figure of an equestrian saint, most likely George. A full-length male saint adjacent to the west portal is damaged and cannot be identified.

Despite the difference in the architectural forms of the churches at Amykles and Gkoritsa, which results in changes to figural proportions, and despite the damage to the surface of the St. Nicholas paintings, the representations in both churches share a number of stylistic and iconographic elements, suggesting the involvement of one of the Gkoritsa painters in this program. This suggestion is strengthened by the inclusion of the rare portrait of St. Eustathios, which may reveal the identity of the church's painter.⁵⁶ The decorative band at the center of the vault in St. Nicholas, with its intricate foliate design and its

red, blue, and ochre coloration, is nearly identical to that at the center of the cross vault at Gkoritsa, indicating a common painter, pattern, or both (see above, Figs. 9 and 13). In the two churches, the painter pays close attention to details of costume, furnishings, and fabrics. The altar cloth in the scene of the Presentation of the Virgin is nearly identical in the two churches, as is the shape of the ciborium with its pyramidal roof and narrow columns. Narrative scenes in both churches include profile faces with similarly prominent noses, full lips, and thick eyebrows. The scenes of the Raising of Lazarus in St. Nicholas and the Betrayal in the Taxiarches include figures that wear unusual red hoods outlined in black (Figs. 15 and 16). The letterforms in the painted inscriptions are nearly identical in both churches, displaying the same shape of the alpha, theta, mu, and phi.

The Church of Prophet Elijah in Amykles (Stilavochorion)

The Church of Prophet Elijah in Amykles shares a common architectural form with the Taxiarches, although it is larger in size (8.0 × 4.5 m).⁵⁷ The mid-thirteenth-century paintings in the church, the earliest phase of decoration, are found in the sanctuary and cross vault. The scenes include large-scale representations of the Baptism on the south wall and the Dormition on the north wall. Above these scenes, in the upper register of the side walls, are two frontal, half-length military saints (north wall) and two half-length archangels (south wall) who turn slightly toward the adjacent vault. The paired figures are represented to either side of windows. The vault contains four narrative scenes: the Nativity, the Presentation in the Temple, the Transfiguration, and Doubting Thomas. Although the colors of the Prophet Elijah paintings are muted, possibly on account of surface loss, the scenes of the Nativity in this church and the Taxiarches are remarkably

54 The Anastasis is largely damaged. Only the heads of Adam and Eve are preserved.

55 The right side of the scene of the Entry into Jerusalem is damaged.

56 Images of St. Eustathios (labeled “Άγιος Ευσταθιος”) are found in the prothesis chamber of church of St. Nicholas in Ayios Nikolaos, Epidauros Limera (N. Drandakis, “Οι τοιχογραφίες του Άγιου Νικολάου στον Άγιο Νικόλαο Μονεμβασίας,” *Δελτ.Χριστ.Αρχ.Επ.* 9 [1977–1979]: 35–61, at 40, no. 49), in the churches of St. Demetrios and St. Athanasios in Krokees (K. Diamanti, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αγίου Δημητρίου (1286) της Κροκίας της Λακωνίας και το εργαστήριο του ανώνυμου ζωγράφου, Συμβολή στη μελέτη της πρώιμης παλαιολόγειας ζωγραφικής στη Λακωνία*, Αρχαιολογικό Ινστιτούτο Πελοποννησιακών Σπουδών–Σειρά μονογραφιών και διδακτορικών διατριβών 2 [Athens, 2012], 130–31), and in the church of the Taxiarches in Glezou, Mani (personal observation). In the Palaiomonastero at Vrontamas, Eustathios is represented among the equestrian saints in the outer narthex (Drandakis, “Το Παλιμονάστηρο του Βρονταμά,” pl. 97a).

57 The church of Prophet Elijah is briefly mentioned together with the Taxiarches in a 1978 report by the Ephorate of Lakonia (*Αρχ.Δελτ.* 33, Χρ. Β'1 [1978]: 105). For additional mentions of the church, see also *Αρχ.Δελτ.* 38, Χρ. Β'1 (1983): 101; *Αρχ.Δελτ.* 50, Χρ. Β'1 (1995): 168 (mentioning traces of an earlier floor and a Byzantine tomb); *Αρχ.Δελτ.* 51, Χρ. Β'1 (1996): 173, pl. 55. See also Drandakis, “Σχεδιάσμα,” 180; Diamanti, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αγίου Δημητρίου*, 160, 162, where the author compares the painting of certain figures stylistically to those in St. Demetrios, Krokees (1286). For a brief overview of the church, see Antonakos, *Αμύκλαι*, 208–20.



Fig. 17. Church of Prophet Elijah, Amykles, the Nativity. Photo by author.

similar in composition (see above, Fig. 9, and Fig. 17). The scene of the Dormition also resembles that at Gkoritsa, including the rendering of the buildings in the background and the postures of the apostles gathered around the bier. The Presentation in the Temple is reversed, with Mary and Joseph standing to the right of the altar. The ciborium, as in the church at Gkoritsa and in St. Nicholas, Amykles, has a pyramidal roof. In addition to similarities in the composition of several narrative scenes, the distinctive hairstyles of several of the male figures, with discrete sections and tufts, recall the paintings in Gkoritsa. The identical treatment of the hair can be seen in both the depiction of the apostles in the Doubting Thomas and in the Dormition and the representation of Joseph in the Presentation in the Temple (Fig. 18). Although the paintings in the church require further examination—many are still covered by layers of paint from the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries—it seems likely that Eustathios, who was responsible for the narrative scenes in the vault at Gkoritsa and the church of St. Nicholas at Amykles, also worked in this church.

The painters Sergios and Eustathios traveled from Stlavochorion to Gkoritsa. They carried with them the knowledge of how to write and how to paint. Their village of origin was not a backwater without access to culture. According to Pamela Armstrong, excavations in modern Amykles have yielded tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantine ceramics, some from Constantinople, indicating that this was a relatively wealthy village with access to imported goods.⁵⁸ The

58 *Αρχ. Δελτ.* 49, Χρ. Β'1 (1994): 188; *Αρχ. Δελτ.* 51, Χρ. Β'1 (1996), 131. The ceramic finds are discussed in Armstrong, "The Monasteries of Saint Nikon," 358.



Fig. 18. Church of Prophet Elijah, Amykles, Presentation in the Temple (detail). Photo by author.

construction and decoration of at least two churches in the mid-thirteenth century indicates that villagers had the means to hire masons and painters.

The Taxiarches as a Lakonian Church

In 2014, Anastasia Drandaki argued that the painted program of the church of the Taxiarches includes “certain peculiarities” characteristic of thirteenth-century Lakonian painting, for instance “the detail of Christ Emmanuel in a fleece or cloud in the scene of the Annunciation” (see below).⁵⁹ Drandaki also highlighted

59 Drandaki, “A Maniera Greca,” 61. For the unusual scene of the Annunciation, see N. Drandakis, “Πόκος ἢ νεφέλη: Ἀσυνήθιστη λεπτομέρεια τῆς παραστάσεως τοῦ Εὐαγγελισμοῦ στὴ Βυζαντινὴ εἰκονογραφία;,” *Επ.Επ.Φιλ.Σχολ.Αθην.* 26 (1977–1979): 258–68.

the representation of St. Romanos Sklepodioktes, a figure with a strong local cult. In 2018, Michalis Kappas and I proposed connections to nearby Geraki, particularly to the Evangelistria church of circa 1200 in the lower settlement,⁶⁰ and to the Palaionastero at Vrontamas, whose earliest phase of painting is dated to 1201.⁶¹ Representations of the Virgin in the churches at Gkoritsa and Vrontamas share the unusual epithet *H EBEPETHC* (Evergetis).⁶² The epithet “Kecharitomene” (Full of Grace) is used for the representation of the Virgin in the apse at Gkoritsa and is echoed in several churches in the area, including St. Nicholas in Amykles, as noted above, and the church of the Dormition in Ayia Marina (Tseria).⁶³

The selection of imagery in the church of the Taxiarches reflects regional trends in church decoration that are deeply rooted in Komnenian painting traditions. The east side of the masonry sanctuary screen in the Taxiarches is decorated with four frontal episcopal saints—Leo of Catania, Hypatios, Basil of Amasea, and Polycarp (Fig. 19). Between them, and immediately above the portal leading to the nave, is the representation of the Holy Keramion. In Lakonia, Polycarp is frequently represented on the east side of the sanctuary screen,⁶⁴ the representation of Leo of Catania highlights a saint of regional importance.⁶⁵ The depiction of four bishops in this location is rare; painters in Lakonia favored the representation of two bishops on the altar

60 Gerstel and Kappas, “Between East and West,” 179–80. For the Geraki churches, see Moutsopoulos and Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι*, 135–36 (with collected bibliography).

61 Drandakis, “Το Παλιονάστηρο του Βρονταμά,” 159–94.

62 In the Gkoritsa church, the epithet “Evergetis” is found on the image of the Virgin on the sanctuary screen.

63 Personal observation. For the churches, see Drandakis, “Σχεδιάσμα,” nos. 72, 112.

64 For a preliminary catalogue of churches in the region with representations of bishops on the east side of the masonry sanctuary screen, see S. Gerstel, “An Alternate View of the Late Byzantine Sanctuary Screen,” in *Thresholds of the Sacred: Art Historical, Archaeological, Liturgical and Theological Views on Religious Screens, East and West*, ed. S. Gerstel (Washington, DC, 2006), 134–61.

65 A. Takoumi and K. Tassoyannopoulou, “Entre Constantinople et périphérie: Saint Léon, Évêque de Catane, particulièrement vénéré en Laconie, Péloponnèse,” in *En Sofia Mathitéfsantes: Essays in Byzantine Material Culture and Society in Honour of Sophia Kalopissi-Verti*, ed. C. Diamanti and A. Vassiliou (Oxford, 2019), 81–99.



Fig. 19. Church of the Taxiarches, Gkoritsa, altar side of sanctuary screen. Photo by author.

side of the screen.⁶⁶ As in the Taxiarches, the sanctuary screen in the unpublished Kokkini Ekklesia outside of Geraki presents four bishops on the altar side.⁶⁷ Of these, traces of two survive on the north half of the screen, one of them labeled “Alexios.”⁶⁸ The church of St. Demetrios in Krokees, dated to 1286, also presents two frontal bishops to either side of the arched portal,

which is also crowned by the image of the Keramion.⁶⁹ In addition to having a common architectural type, the two churches share a number of iconographic features, suggesting that the painter of St. Demetrios, Krokees, was acquainted with the Gkoritsa church.

Certain decorative techniques can also be viewed as regional. Although scholars have viewed ornately decorated haloes as a technique imported from Cyprus or the West and as a signifier of cultural contact,⁷⁰ the

66 In Geraki, see the churches of the Evangelistria and St. Basil (unpublished; personal observation). For churches in Krokees, see Diamanti, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αγίου Δημητρίου*.

67 The diminutive church is located 2 km west of Geraki. For a preliminary description of the paintings, see Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι*, 182.

68 Personal observation. Alexios should be identified with the monastic saint Alexios, “Man of God,” who is also represented in the Church of St. George in Geraki (Demetrokallis, *Γεράκι*, 54, 57), the Palaiomonastero near Vrontamas (Drandakis, “Το Παλιοναστήριον του Βρονταμά,” 175), and St. Nicholas in Ayios Nikolaos, Epidauros Limera (Drandakis, “Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αγίου Νικολάου στὸν Ἅγιο Νικόλαο Μονεμβασίας,” 40, no. 70).

69 The two bishops on the north side of the wall are no longer preserved. Sabbas and Athanasios are represented on the south side. See Diamanti, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αγίου Δημητρίου*, 38.

70 See K. Weitzmann, “Thirteenth Century Crusader Icons on Mount Sinai,” *AB* 45 (1963): 179–203, at 183; K. Weitzmann, “Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom,” *DOP* 20 (1966): 49–83, at 59, 70; M. S. Frinta, “Raised Gilded Adornment of the Cypriot Icons and the Occurrence of the Technique in the West,” *Gesta* 20 (1981): 333–47; M. S. Frinta, “Relief Decoration in Gilded Pastiglia on the Cypriot Icons and Its Propagation in the West,” *Πρακτικά τοῦ Β' Διεθνoῦς Κυπρολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου, Λευκωσία, 20–25 Ἀπριλίου 1982* (Leukosia,

presence of haloes decorated in this manner in the church of Hagios Strategos at the site of Niokastro outside of Kastania, Messenian Mani, precisely dated to 1194, indicates that painters in the Peloponnesos had introduced this decorative embellishment into their repertoire before the period of Frankish rule, perhaps through late twelfth-century metropolitan patronage in the region.⁷¹ In the Kastania church, where the Byzantine emperor Isaac II Angelos (r. 1185–1195) is named in an inscription, the haloes of Christ, St. Michael the Archangel, and most likely the Virgin Mary are adorned with a rinceau formed of thick white paint that stands out in slight relief from the wall surface. Geographically closer to Gkoritsa, but slightly postdating the church of the Taxiarches, is the cave chapel of St. John the Baptist located at Tsilioto, close to Chrysapha.⁷² The halo of the church's titular saint is similarly decorated with a rinceau pattern. A simpler rinceau using the same technique can be seen in the representation of the Virgin in the apse of Hagia Kyriake in Marathos, Mani, dated to circa 1300.⁷³

The haloes at Gkoritsa are significant to this discussion. Surrounding the heads of the two archangels in the Synaxis, the principal devotional figures of the church, are haloes divided into grids by means of raised white painted lines (see above, Fig. 7). Around the perimeter of the halo is a band decorated to resemble colored gemstones alternating with pearls, a pattern also found in narrative scenes in the church. The image of Christ on the sanctuary screen is adorned with a halo divided into a grid; each cell encloses a foliate ornament (see below, Fig. 28). The same pattern is applied to the halo of the Virgin; a rinceau design ornaments the halo of the Christ child in her arms. The monumental figure

of the equestrian St. George, located in a blind arch on the north wall (see below, Fig. 25), also has a decorated halo, as does the figure of St. John the Baptist. On the halo of St. George, the painter has created a rinceau similar to those seen in Hagios Strategos, Kastania. The presence of decorated haloes appears to be much more common in the southern Peloponnesos than previously understood. Their decoration manifests the love of ornament found in painted churches in the region.

Two aspects of the scene of the Annunciation also ground the Gkoritsa church in local painting: the representation of Christ Emmanuel in a fleece or cloud and the depiction of the Virgin as standing in front of her throne. Nikolaos Drandakis first investigated the representation of Christ Emmanuel in a fleece or cloud at the Palaionomonastero outside Vrontamas and St. Nicholas at Agoriane. Following on his work, Anastasia Drandaki, as noted above, identified this detail as particular to Lakonia.⁷⁴ This image of Christ Emmanuel is found in churches close to Gkoritsa and in the Taxiarches church itself. The Gkoritsa church plays a role in understanding the scene because of the painting's established date and also because of the presence of an additional figure, King David, who extends a scroll with the words of Psalm 71 (72):6: "He will descend like rain on a fleece, and like drops dripping on the earth" (Fig. 20).⁷⁵ The paintings in the churches at Vrontamas and Agoriane that Drandakis discusses are later in date than those at Gkoritsa. Close in date to the paintings of the Taxiarches, however, are those in the Panayitsa church in Koumousta, which share other decorative elements, including the distinctive treatment of the hair of several figures. The scene of the Annunciation located on the north side of the vault at Koumousta is worn, but the small figure of the Christ child is still visible (Fig. 21). His body turns, as his right hand crosses his chest and his left covers his lower torso. A similarly posed figure, though

1986), 2:539–44; S. Kalopissi-Verti, "Διακοσμημένοι φωτοστέφανοι σὲ εἰκόνες καὶ τοιχογραφίες τῆς Κύπρου καὶ τοῦ ἐλλαδικοῦ χώρου," *Πρακτικά τοῦ Β' Διεθνoῦς Κυπριολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου, Λευκωσία, 20–25 Ἀπριλίου 1982* (Leukosia, 1986), 2:555–60; Drandaki, "A Maniera Greca," 61.

71 M. Kappas, "Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ Αἰ Στρατηγoῦ παρὰ τὴν Καστάνια τῆς Μεσσηνιακῆς Μάνης," in *Ἀρχονταρίκι: Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν Εὐθύμιο Ν. Τσιγαρίδα*, ed. E. Kotsou and V. Theophilopoulou (Athens, 2021), 231–54, at 238–39, 250–51. In Kastania, two later churches, St. Peter and the burial church of St. John, also contain decorated haloes. The painters use a different technique, impressing the design into the paint (personal observation).

72 Personal observation. See N. Drandakis, "Ὁ σπηλαιώδης ναὸς τοῦ Προδρόμου κοντὰ στὴ Χρύσαφα τῆς Λακεδαιμόνος," *Δελτ. Χριστ. Ἀρχ. Ἐτ.* 15 (1989–1990): 179–96, at 184.

73 Kalopissi-Verti, "Διακοσμημένοι φωτοστέφανοι," 555–60.

74 Drandakis, "Πόκος ἢ νεφέλη," 258–68; Drandaki, "A Maniera Greca," 61; A. Euthimiou, "Εὐαγγελισμὸς Πόκος: Ἡ Ταυτοποίηση μιᾶς εἰκονογραφικῆς λεπτομέρειας παραστάσεων τοῦ θέματος στὴν περιοχή τῆς Λακωνίας," in *300 Συμπόσιο ΧΑΕ* (Athens, 2010), 39, 40. Leonela Fundić and Michalis Kappas have recently suggested that the inclusion of the fleece may have political undertones; this seems unlikely in my opinion. See L. Fundić and M. Kappas, "Stauroproskynesis: An Iconographic Theme and Its Context," *Δελτ. Χριστ. Ἀρχ. Ἐτ.* 34 (2013): 141–56, at 153.

75 Καὶ καταθήσεται ὡς ὑετὸς ἐπὶ πόκον καὶ ὡσεὶ σταγόνες στάζοσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν. The painter writes the word καταβήσετε as καταθήσεται.



Fig. 20. Church of the Taxiarches, Gkoritsa, the Annunciation. Photo by author.

turned in the opposite direction, is found in the representation of the Annunciation in Hagia Sophia, Geraki. The small, vaulted chapel (7.5 × 4.5 m), originally dedicated to the Holy Anargyroi, is located outside Geraki in the direction of Vrontamas.⁷⁶ Many of the churches that include the image of the Christ child in a fleece are found in close proximity to Geraki and Gkoritsa. Others, like the church of the Dormition in Ayia Marina and the Panayitsa in Koumousta, fall geographically closer to Stlavochorion (Amykles), the village of the painters' origin. The form of the Annunciation in the Church of the Taxiarches fits squarely within the repertoire of Lakonian painters in this area.

⁷⁶ The paintings in the church are unpublished. The inscription was read by Panayotis Katsafados. I am grateful to him for sharing this information with me.

The representation of the Virgin as standing in the scene of the Annunciation is also common in this part of Lakonia. In many churches in the region, including St. Nicholas in Amykles (as noted above), St. Basil in Geraki,⁷⁷ St. Nicholas near Alepochori,⁷⁸ St. Demetrios in Krokees,⁷⁹ and others,⁸⁰ the Annunciation is depicted in the lower register of the east wall to either side of the apse. In these small churches, the archangel approaches the standing Virgin across the

⁷⁷ The paintings in this church are unpublished.

⁷⁸ For St. Nicholas, see A. Gkiaouri, "Ο ναός του Ἁγίου Νικολάου κοντὰ στὸ Γεράκι," *Ἀρχ. Δελτ.* 32 (1977): 91–115, at 99.

⁷⁹ Diamanti, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του Ἁγίου Δημητρίου*, 62–64.

⁸⁰ See, for example, St. Nicholas in Vlachioti (Koukiaris, "Ο Ἁγ. Νικόλαος στοῦ Βλαχιώτη," 247–48) and St. Demetrios Tsilioti in Chrysapha (Drandakis, "Ο σπηλαιώδης ναός του Προδρόμου," 184).

space of the altar table, visually connecting theological writings about the Incarnation with liturgical performance. Unusually, the church of the Dormition in Ayia Marina (Tseria) presents the Annunciation in the upper register of the south cross arm of the nave. The figures of the archangel and standing Virgin are divided by a window, but their appearance resembles the representation at Gkoritsa in scale and the location within the program.

The church of the Taxiarches at Gkoritsa, moreover, shares ornamental patterns with other churches in Lakonia. As noted above, a nearly identical ornamental band is found at Gkoritsa and in St. Nicholas, Amykles (see above, Figs. 9 and 13). As at Gkoritsa, the church of the Dormition at Ayia Marina (Tseria) has a decorative band containing an ochre-colored fleshy leaf enclosed in a red circle, which divides narrative scenes at the center of a vault.⁸¹ The two churches have other common elements: a similar attenuation of the figures in the lower register and the crisp, horizontal division of drapery. The distinctive, segmented hairstyles of male figures associated with the painter Eustathios are also found in this church in the scenes of the Raising of Lazarus and the Nativity (Fig. 22). The decoration of the altar table with a pattern of concentric squares that resemble gemstones held by prongs is found in both Gkoritsa and the church of the Panayitsa in Koumousta.

One additional aspect of decoration places the Gkoritsa church's inscription and painting within a local context. Within the dedicatory inscription, an exceptionally high number of painted midline dots mark divisions between words and occasionally between syllables. In the church of St. Nicholas at Amykles there is a midline dot in the scene of the Raising of Lazarus after the name of Martha (see above, Fig. 13). Such dots had a decorative function, as Andreas Rhoby has suggested, and may also have assisted the viewer in reading the text.⁸² Their use as ornament accords with other aspects of Byzantine church decoration in Lakonia, where white dots, projecting from the wall surface,

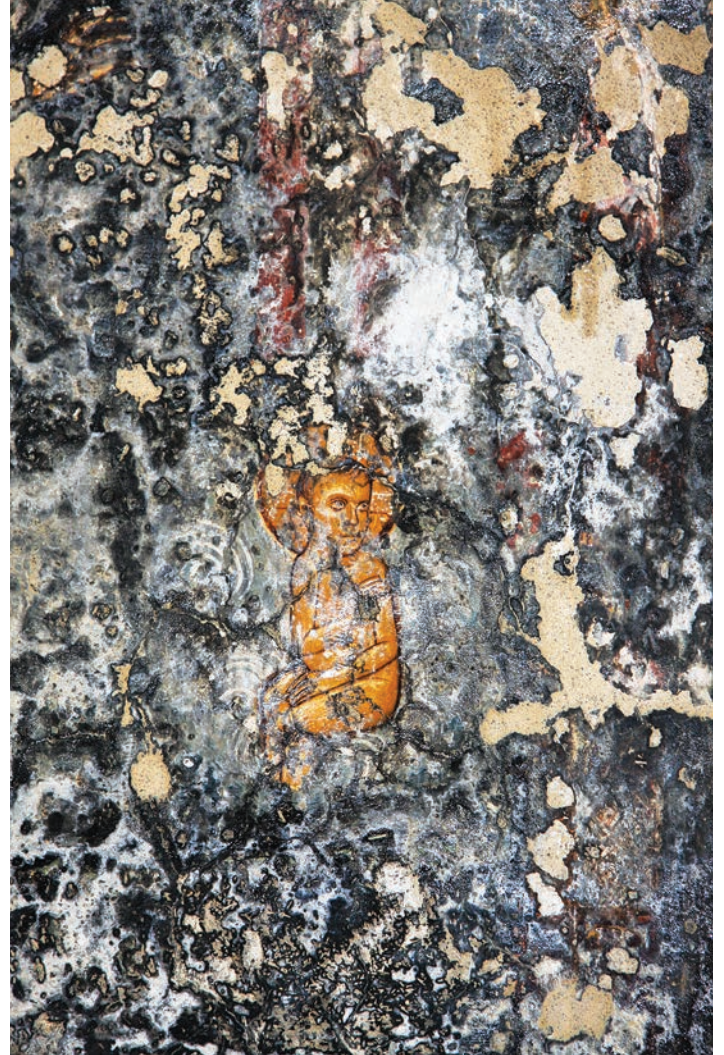


Fig. 21. Church of the Panayitsa, Koumousta (detail of Christ child). Photo by author.

adorn clothing and furnishings.⁸³ As noted above, the haloes of the archangels at Gkoritsa are divided into a checkerboard pattern enclosing stippled white dots (see above, Fig. 7).

Establishing the date of the Church of the Taxiarches urges a reconsideration of painted churches in the area. As I have argued, the churches of St. Nicholas and Prophet Elijah at Amykles should be attributed to one of the painters who was active at Gkoritsa. The churches at Tseria and Koumousta, which have been tied to the decoration of St. Demetrios in Krokees (completed in

81 At Gkoritsa, the band with foliate ornament is at the center of the west vault.

82 A. Rhoby, "Interpunktionszeichen in byzantinischen Versinschriften," in *Griechisch-byzantinische Handschriftenforschung: Traditionen, Entwicklungen, neue Wege*, ed. C. Brockmann et al. (Berlin, 2020), 1:293–302, at 297, 300.

83 Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes*, 52.



Fig. 22. Church of the Dormition, Ayia Marina (Tseria), detail of the Nativity with Joseph. Photo by author.

1286),⁸⁴ may in fact have been painted closer to 1258. It is possible that one of the Gkoritsa painters was involved in these commissions. Although a full analysis of the paintings in the Church of the Taxiarches is beyond the scope of this article, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that its paintings fit comfortably within the framework of Lakonian church decoration of the thirteenth century.

The Taxiarches between East and West

The Gkoritsa paintings were executed in 1258, when the surrounding region was ruled by Frankish lords. In the summer of 1258, shortly after the completion of the church's decoration on May 1, Anna Komnene Doukaina, the second daughter of Michael II Doukas and his spouse, Theodora Petraliphaina, was married to William II Villehardouin (r. 1246–1278) in Old Patras, a union that forged a critical alliance between the crusader princes of Achaia and the despots of Epirus.⁸⁵ We

may see this as a moment of heightened receptivity to cultural interactions. At the time of the church's construction, the nearby castle of Geraki was in the hands of a Frankish baron.⁸⁶ According to the historian Georgios Pachymeres, Byzantine hegemony was restored over Geraki, the medieval Ierakion, perhaps as early as 1262/1263.⁸⁷ The sources suggest that at the time of its construction, Frankish knights and their retinues circulated in the immediate vicinity of the church of the Taxiarches, taking advantage of the nearby road that led from Geraki to Lakedaimon (Sparta). Several aspects of the church's painted decoration suggest the impact of cultural convergences in the region. Writing about the paintings at Gkoritsa, Anastasia Drandaki noted the "Italianate style" in the depiction of the archangels, emphasizing the green shades of the underpainting.⁸⁸ In our preliminary study of the paintings, Michalis Kappas and I commented on the rendering of the folds of the mantles of the apostles Peter, Paul, and John, which may have been influenced by the kinds of chiseled folds found in Western sculpture and manuscripts (Fig. 23). Other costume elements may also point to artistic influences that are not local. Kappas and I observed that the unusual form of the *loros* and crown worn by St. Catherine, represented on the southeastern pier of the church, closely resembles elements found in contemporary paintings in Italy.⁸⁹

Beyond aspects of style, which may reflect the training and experience of the painter or his exposure to works in the possession of or commissioned by people from outside the region, a comparison of details of

Pachymères (Paris, 2001), I:116–17; Nikephoros Gregoras, *Byzantina Historia*, ed. L. Schopen and I. Bekker, 3 vols. (Bonn, 1829–1855), I:71, lines 22–23.

86 The original barony was awarded to Guy de Nivelet. See J. Schmitt, *The Chronicle of the Morea [To Chronikon tou Moreas]: A History in Political Verse, Relating the Establishment of Feudalism in Greece by the Franks in the 13th Century* (London, 1904), 131. Most scholars credit Guy's son, Jean, with the construction of the medieval fortifications some decades later, in ca. 1250.

87 I. Bekker, ed., *Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης, Συγγραφικαὶ Ἱστορίαι—Georgii Pachymeris, De Michaelae et Andronico Palaeologis libri tredecim*, CSHB 1 (Bonn, 1853), 87–88.

88 Drandaki, "A Maniera Greca," 61.

89 "Between East and West," 180; M. Ciatti, "The Typology, Meaning, and Use of Some Panel Paintings from the Duecento and Trecento," in *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento*, ed. V. M. Schmidt (Washington, DC, 2002), 15–29; M. Boskovits, *The Origins of Florentine Painting: 1100–1270* (Florence, 1993), 1.137–45.

84 Diamanti, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αγίου Δημητρίου*, 185–91.

85 *I Registri della cancelleria angiona*, V (Naples, 1968), 81, no. 348; *I Registri della cancelleria angiona*, XXVI (Naples, 1979), 25, no. 171; A. Failler, *La version brève des relations historiques de Georges*

the imagery may indicate the intertwining of cultural strands. In the Church of the Taxiarches, the full-length, frontal figures of Peter and Paul are accompanied by John the Theologian.⁹⁰ Representations of the embracing Peter and Paul are often interpreted as expressions of ideas about Church reconciliation. At Gkoritsa, the painter conceived of the apostles as a trio; Peter and John turn slightly toward Paul, who stands between them. The three carry codices and are represented in similar costumes. The representation of John, one of the most significant apostles of the Eastern Church, foregrounds a figure whose cult would intensify in later centuries.⁹¹ Depicted together, the representation proclaims, as Sophia Kalopissi-Verti has recently noted, a reconnection to the origins of the church “with a renewed emphasis on the initial, united, ecumenical, and apostolic Church and consequently the strengthening of the Orthodox faith.”⁹² Given the date and location of the Church of the Taxiarches, this assertion of religious identity through the representation of the three apostles is not surprising. The depiction of Nikon adjacent to St. John, as Anna Takoumi has asserted, demonstrates the saint’s apostolic activity and status in the region. His placement in this location—joining the apostles—represents the intentional promotion of the most important local saint.⁹³

The prominent depiction of Mary Magdalene in the scene of the Deposition suggests an awareness of her cult in the West and the saint’s burgeoning importance in the region (Fig. 24). In the mid-thirteenth century, painters were already placing greater emphasis on the Myrrhophores, whose sorrowful reaction was intended to generate an affective response, especially when



Fig. 23. Church of the Taxiarches, Gkoritsa, Peter, Paul, John the Theologian, Nikon. Photo by author.

viewed during the chanted services of Holy Week.⁹⁴ At Gkoritsa, the Myrrhophore at the right side of the scene places her face gently against Christ’s hand, which she supports. On the left side of the cross, the Virgin cradles her son’s upper torso and touches her face to

90 Drandaki, “A Maniera Greca,” 63, does not include the representation of John the Theologian in her discussion.

91 Gerstel and Kappas, “Between East and West,” 181; S. Kalopissi-Verti, “Preaching, the Role of the Apostles, and the Evidence of Iconography in East and West: Byzantine Responses to the ‘Challenges’ from the Latin Church after 1204,” in *Intercultural Encounters in Medieval Greece after 1204: The Evidence of Art and Material Culture*, ed. V. Foskolou and S. Kalopissi-Verti (Turnhout, 2022), 489–530, at 507–8. On the cult of St. John the Theologian in Late Byzantium, see B. Pentcheva, “Imagined Images: Visions of Salvation and Intercession in a Double-Sided Icon from Poganovo,” *DOP* 54 (2000): 139–53, at 148.

92 Kalopissi-Verti, “Preaching,” 515.

93 Takoumi, “The Use of the Past,” 147–56.

94 On this subject, see V. A. Foskolou, “Mary Magdalene between East and West: Cult and Image, Relics and Politics in the Late Thirteenth-Century Eastern Mediterranean,” *DOP* 65/66 (2011–2012): 271–96, at 277. See, for example, the painting in Mileševa (ca. 1235): G. Millet and A. Frolov, *La peinture du moyen âge en Yougoslavie* (Paris, 1954), 1:pl. 65.2; V. J. Djurić, “Mileševsko najstarije slikarstvo: Izvori i paralele,” in *Mileševa u istoriji srpskog naroda*, ed. V. J. Djurić (Belgrade, 1987), 27–36, at 36.

Fig. 24.
Church of the
Taxiarches, Gkoritsa,
the Deposition.
Photo by author.



his. Her posture and expression recall her representation in Byzantine scenes of the Entombment, which emphasize the maternal grief of the Virgin from as early as the twelfth century.⁹⁵ In the left foreground, Mary Magdalene, dressed in a bright red *maphorion*, holds her left hand to her face in a gesture of sorrow and with her right points to the body of Christ.⁹⁶ The figure is

emphasized by her position and scale and the bright color of her dress. As far as I know, this is a unique foregrounding of the Magdalene in Byzantine art in this region, if not more broadly.

Mary Magdalene's depiction recalls the importance of this saint for the French knights in the region, suggesting a reason for the unusual prominence of her image in this church. The saint's cult was heavily promoted by the Abbey of Ste-Marie-Madeleine in Vézelay, Burgundy, approximately 130 km from the

95 For representations of the Deposition, see Y. Nagatsuka, *Descente de la Croix, son développement iconographique des origines jusqu'à la fin du XIV^e siècle* (Tokyo, 1979).

96 For Mary Magdalene's gesture, see H. Maguire, "The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art," *DOP* 31 (1977): 125–74; H. Maguire, "Women Mourners in Byzantine Art, Literature, and

Society," in *Experiencing Byzantium*, ed. C. Nesbitt and M. Jackson (Farnham, 2013), 195–210.

ancestral lands of the Villehardouin.⁹⁷ The church was a major pilgrimage site in the twelfth century and was closely associated with the launching of the Second and Third Crusades. In 1279, two decades following the construction of the Gkoritsa church, Charles II of Anjou would discover another set of the saint's relics in Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume in Provence. These relics were authenticated and translated to Naples, establishing a competing center for the saint's veneration. Mary Magdalene was promoted as the patron saint of the Angevin dynasty, and as Vicky Foskolou has noted, "Charles's status on the political scene of Frankish southern Greece . . . makes it very likely that this conflict [over which center had the genuine relics] was not unknown in Byzantium."⁹⁸ The Angevin promotion of the cult of St. Mary Magdalene may have had an impact on later churches in Lakonia, which fell under the rule of Charles of Anjou following the death of William II Villehardouin in 1278.⁹⁹ The full-length representation of St. Mary Magdalene in the church of St. John the Baptist in Chrysapha, dated 1367/68, reflects the

diffusion of this cult in Lakonia.¹⁰⁰ Slightly later, a dedicatory inscription in the church of St. George in Longanikos, Lakonia, dated 1374/75, includes the name Magdalene, a nun and the sister of the donor, the priest and *nomikos* Vasilios Kourtesis, indicating the impact of this cult on church onomastics.¹⁰¹ The representation of Mary Magdalene in the scene of the Deposition at Gkoritsa indicates that even before the Angevin "discovery" of the relics in 1279, painters and patrons in Lakonia were demonstrating an awareness of the importance of this saint, an interest that may be connected with the presence of the Villehardouin and other Frankish knights in this part of Lakonia.

The figure of the equestrian St. George must also be viewed within developments in regional painting, where in the thirteenth century military saints began to be represented on horseback.¹⁰² As I have observed elsewhere, aspects of horse tack and riding gear, including the shape of the saddle and spurs, appear to reflect the kinds of equestrian equipment favored by Frankish knights.¹⁰³ St. George's image, painted in the western blind arch on the north wall, forms part of a program of military figures in this corner of the church (Fig. 25). Prokopios and an unidentified saint are represented in full length on the intrados of the arch. Demetrios is found on the adjacent west wall and Theodore Stratelates on the adjacent north wall. Immediately above the image of St. George are half-length images of Constantine and Helena. Their presence among the holy soldiers ties the safety of the empire to the protection of its military saints. The equestrian George pushes back against the cantle of his saddle and extends his leg forward, stabilizing his body as he turns and thrusts a spear with two hands at the snake writhing at the feet of his white steed. His upper body is clad in lamellar armor and his lower torso in elaborately decorated leggings. The interior of his shield is decorated with circular motifs formed of raised white

97 For the early thirteenth-century promotion of the cult at this site, see V. Saxer, *Le Dossier Vézélien de Marie Madeleine: Invention et translation des reliques en 1265–67*, SubsHag 57 (Brussels, 1975).

98 Foskolou, "Mary Magdalene," 286. See also T. Gross-Diaz, "The Cult of Mary Magdalene in the Medieval West," in *Mary Magdalene from the New Testament to the New Age and Beyond*, ed. E. Lupieri (Leiden, 2019), 151–75; S. S. Wilkins, "Imagining the Angevin Patron Saint: Mary Magdalene in the Pipino Chapel in Naples," *California Italian Studies* 3.1 (2012), 1–27; K. L. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2001), 307–33.

99 Foskolou ("Mary Magdalene," 278) observes the representation of the saint in four churches in Lakonia and one in neighboring Kythera: Palaiomonastero, Vrontamas, Lakonia (1201) (Drandakis, "Το Παλιομονάστηρο του Βρονταμά," 167, pls. 70–71a); Hag. Strategos in Monemvasia (ca. 1250–60) (Gkioles, "Ο ναός του Αϊ Στρατηγού στον Άγιο Νικόλαο Μονεμβασίας," 437, fig. 9); St. Michael the Archangel, Polemitas, Mani (1278) (S. Kalopissi-Verti, "Ο ναός του Αρχαγγέλου Μιχαήλ στον Πολέμιτα της Μέσα Μάνης (1278)," in *Αντίφωνον ἀφιέρωμα στον καθηγητή Ν. Β. Δρανδάκη*, ed. V. Katsaros [Thessaloniki, 1994], 451–74, at 463); and Soterias, Kalopyrgos Drys, Mani (last quarter of the thirteenth century) (N. Drandakis, "Παρατηρήσεις στις τοιχογραφίες του 13ου αιώνα που σώζονται στη Μάνη," in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress, Major Papers* [New Rochelle, NY, 1986], 683–721, at 686, fig. 1). The saint is also found in St. Andrew, Perlengianika on Kythera (third quarter of the thirteenth century) (M. Chatzidakis and I. Bitha, *Corpus of the Byzantine Wall-Paintings of Greece*, vol. 1, *The Island of Kythera* [Athens, 2003], no. 3a, 78–79, fig. 8).

100 Drandakis, "Ο σταυροειδής ναός του Προδρόμου," 301–33.

101 O. Chassoura, *Les peintures murales byzantines des églises de Longanikos, Laconie* (Athens, 2002), 19, 418, fig. 24. For the inscription, see D. Feissel and A. Philippides-Braat, "Inventaires en vue d'un recueil des inscriptions historiques de Byzance, III, Inscriptions du Peloponnèse (à l'exception de Mistra)," *TM* 9 (1985): 267–383, at 339–40, pl. XXV; S. Gerstel and A.-M. Talbot, "Nuns in the Byzantine Countryside," *Δελτ. Χρ. Αρχ. Έτ.* 27 (2006): 481–90, at 485, fig. 3.

102 Gerstel, "Art and Identity," 263–85.

103 Gerstel, "Art and Identity," 263–85.



Fig. 25. Church of the Taxiarches, Gkoritsa, St. George. Photo by author.



Fig. 26. Church of the Dormition, Ayia Marina (Tseria), St. Demetrios. Photo by author.



Fig. 27.
Church of the
Taxiarches,
Gkoritsa, incised
figure below
St. George.
Photo by author.



Fig. 28.
Church of the Taxiarches,
Gkoritsa, Archangel
Gabriel, detail of metal
fitting. Photo by author.

dots with a round blue core, the same ornamentation found on the halo of Christ in the scene of the Entry into Jerusalem. At the center of his shield is an embossed motif, a Greek foliate cross framed by circles on a gold ground. In the church of the Dormition in Ayia Marina (Tseria), an identical emblem decorates the shield of St. Demetrios, who rides a white horse nearly identical to that of St. George (Fig. 26).¹⁰⁴ At the bottom of the painting in the Gkoritsa church, between the horse and the snake, are incised crude figures of warriors who carry shield and swords (Fig. 27).¹⁰⁵ At some point in the Late Byzantine

history of this church, the image of the equestrian saint gained significance for those engaged in battle in this area. The act of incising figures of warriors indicates that the saint had sustained importance to the community that used this church.

The Taxiarches and the West

One element in the church is purely Western: the application of metal fittings to the wall surface to enclose glass cabochons or stone imitations (now missing). The clasps of the mantles of the archangels and the blue belt of the Archangel Michael in the Synaxis still preserve the remains of metal fittings (Fig. 28).¹⁰⁶ It is possible that the clasp of the mantle of St. George was also

104 Personal observation. The church is unpublished.

105 The weaponry held by the incised figures in the Taxiarches indicates that they should be dated close to the painting of the church. Similar figures are incised around the figures of the military saints in the Church of Sts. Theodore in Myrtia, near Geraki (personal observation). The church is dated by its inscription to 1281/82. For the church, see C. Stavrakos, "The Church of Sts. Theodoroi (formerly St. Kournatos) in Myrtia, Laconia, and Its Inscriptions," in *Inscribing*

Texts in Byzantium: Continuities and Transformations, Papers from the Forty-Ninth Symposium of Byzantine Studies, ed. M. Lauxtermann and I. Toth (Abingdon, 2020), 345–62.

106 Gerstel and Kappas, "Between East and West," 180.

decorated in this manner; this circular section of the wall was excised at some point. In our publication of the church, Kappas and I connected this ornamental detail to the applied cabochons found in Italian duecento and trecento panel paintings. No other church in the Morea exhibits this Western feature. Considered together with the “Italianate style” of the faces of the archangels in the Synaxis (see above, Fig. 7), one might propose the circulation of panel paintings in the region that contained such embellishments. As noted above, the haloes of these figures have ornate relief decoration created by thick white paint, a decorative feature that may also derive from panel paintings. In their original form, these saints, adorned with glass paste “gemstones,” would have stood out from the rest of the figures through their extraordinary embellishment and monumental scale.

Placing the Church of the Taxiarches within a Cultural Framework

Today the church of the Taxiarches stands in isolation at the edge of cultivated fields and close to an important water source. At the time of its construction, however, the church belonged to a settlement that was an important waystation on the main road from Lakedaimon (Sparta) to Geraki and from Geraki to Monemvasia. It is one of three Byzantine churches associated with the modern village of Gkoritsa. Like the Taxiarches, the two other churches have not been fully published. The church of St. George, sited on a hill above the Taxiarches and visible from it, is a modern structure built on the foundations of a Byzantine church.¹⁰⁷ Incorporating the lower registers of the earlier apse, St. George preserves traces of late thirteenth-century paintings of the Communion of the Apostles, four concelebrating hierarchs, and the painted imitation of marble revetment

in the dado zone.¹⁰⁸ The late Byzantine church of St. John (locally called Asprokklesia), located within olive groves to the southwest of Gkoritsa, shares an architectural form with the Taxiarches.¹⁰⁹ The remains of graves and walls surrounding the church of St. John make it clear that it formed part of a small settlement, or *agridion*. Its high-quality painted decoration—including the representation of an elaborate silk textile with roundels and crosses on the west side of the altar table and naturalistic renderings of Sts. Peter and Paul on the north and south walls—points to the involvement of highly skilled painters.

Following the footsteps of Sergios and Eustathios along known medieval routes allows us to examine additional churches in Lakonia and also to consider how the cultural climate in the region may have influenced the painters, and ultimately the decoration of the Taxiarches. Traveling past Gkoritsa, the painters would have arrived in Geraki, an important village at the crossroads of commercial routes running east–west and from the highlands of Parnon to the southern coast. The Church of the Taxiarches and the Evangelistria in Geraki share a number of stylistic and iconographic features, and, as noted above, there are details of imagery in the unpublished churches of Hagia Sophia and the Kokkini Ekklesia, both outside of Geraki, that also suggest a connection. From the end of the twelfth century, Geraki boasted other painted churches that would have been visible to Sergios and Eustathios.¹¹⁰ The Palaiononastero at Vrontamas, with its splendid paintings of 1201, was in close proximity.

Six kilometers north of the Taxiarches church, outside the village of Kalloni and on the direct route to Chrysapha, are the traces of an important monastery, which are now incorporated into the later church

108 See *Arch. Δελτ.* 72, Χρ. Β'1 (2017), 176–77.

109 Foustieris, “*Εικονογραφικά προγράμματα*,” 139; *Arch. Δελτ.* 38, Χρ. Β'1 (1983): 103–4.

110 In addition to the Evangelistria, churches constructed in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century include St. Sozon and St. Athanasios. There is also evidence of a later chapel built over the remains of an excavated fifth-century basilica; excavations of this structure revealed a ceramic glazed plate and goblet, indicating use of the site into the mid- to late twelfth century. See S. Gerstel, “Weaving Geraki’s Long History,” in *Weaving Dreams: Kilims from Geraki, Laconia*, ed. S. Gerstel and S. Pitouli (Athens, 2024), 10. For the excavation of the basilica, see A. Xyngopoulos, “*Ανασκαφή ἐν Γερακίῳ*,” *ΠΛΕ* (1937): 108–14.

107 According to a local priest, graves were found near the church. Although the churches must have been associated with medieval houses or a small settlement, to my knowledge no traces of architectural remains have yet been attested in the fields surrounding the Taxiarches. Preliminary surface surveys that I have conducted around the church have not revealed any fragments of pottery or finds that could point to the existence of houses or other built structures. During a visit to St. George in 2023, however, I observed fragments of coarseware vessels that may be Byzantine on the ground to the south of the church. From the church, the viewer has panoramic views of both Mount Parnon—including Geraki—and Taygetos.

of St. Nicholas. Surviving fragments of sculpture and an opus sectile pavement, probably dated to the late twelfth century, indicate that this was once a prosperous foundation.¹¹¹ Wall paintings survive in traces, but they are too damaged to evaluate. A late twelfth-century chancel slab decorated with an ornate representation of two peacocks, likely from the Church of St. Nicholas, is located today in the post-Byzantine church of the Presentation of the Virgin in Kalloni. Given the monastery's proximity to the church of the Taxiarches, it is certain that the painters would have been aware of its decoration.

From Stlavochorion, the painters had easy access to Lakedaimon, 6 km to the north. This connection is significant. Fragments of tenth- or eleventh-century frescoes uncovered through excavations on the acropolis in the Roman stoa, the putative location of the monastery of St. Nikon, were deemed by the archaeologists to be of "very high" technical and artistic quality and "undoubtedly of considerable importance in the history of Byzantine wall painting."¹¹² Excavation of the sanctuary of a triconch burial church on Agidos Street, below the acropolis, yielded fragments of a painted celebrant holding an inscribed scroll. Numismatic finds from the church indicate that the building was in use through the first half of the thirteenth century.¹¹³ Aside from these excavated fragments, little is preserved of the monumental painting that surely would have adorned the city's churches in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. And yet, the churches of Lakedaimon must have been ornately decorated. The *Life* of St. Nikon describes the resplendence of his shrine in the city, filled everywhere with "pictures of precise craftsmanship and varied material" (γραφαῖς πανταχοῦ τέχνης ἀκριβεῖς καὶ ὕλης ποικιλίαι).¹¹⁴ The Stlavochorion painters who represented St. Nikon in churches at Gkoritsa and Amykles would surely have visited the saint's cult

center in nearby Lakedaimon. The monastery was still functioning when the painters traveled to Gkoritsa to take up their commission.

Pamela Armstrong and David Jacoby have demonstrated that Lakedaimon was prospering in the twelfth century, both through trade in olive oil and through cloth production.¹¹⁵ Venetian *commende*, maritime contracts, point to the permanent residency in the city of merchants from Equilium (modern Jesolo, near Venice). There is ample evidence from excavated ceramics that Lakedaimon was still thriving well into the thirteenth century, with the population centered in the kastro.¹¹⁶ Numismatic finds from excavations in the Roman stoa include a copper coin of William II Villehardouin, struck in the 1250s, the decade in which the church at Gkoritsa was under construction.¹¹⁷ An elegant iron tripod stand found in an excavated context of ca. 1225–1250 demonstrates the high caliber of medieval ironmongery in the city.¹¹⁸ Here, one should recall the very precise representation of lamps and writing equipment in the evangelist portraits in the church of the Taxiarches, which may represent the painters' firsthand knowledge of quality metalwork (see above, Fig. 11).

There is every reason to believe that Sergios and Eustathios would have been familiar with the decoration of standing churches in the city or the artistic yields of the mixed population that inhabited it. There are no traces of crusader-sponsored painting in Lakedaimon or Mistra that might instruct us about monumental decoration commissioned by the Villehardouin.¹¹⁹ Yet the

111 Personal observation. See also Kavvadia, "Ο Άγιος Νικόλαος τῆς Καλλονῆς." See also Drandakis, "Χριστιανικαὶ ἐπιγραφαὶ Λακωνικῆς," 165–66.

112 Waywell et al., "Excavations at Sparta," 407.

113 A. Bakourou, "Τοπογραφικὲς παρατηρήσεις γιὰ τὴ Μεσοβυζαντινὴ Λακεδαιμονία," in "Sparta and Laconia: From Prehistory to Pre-Modern," *British School at Athens Studies* 16 (2009): 301–11; E. Pantou et al., *Protection, Presentation and Enhancement of Monuments That Have Been Revealed within Sparta's Urban Tissue* (Sparta, 2015), 26–31.

114 D. Sullivan, trans., *The Life of St. Nikon* (Brookline, MA, 1987), 188, lines 86–87, 189.

115 P. Armstrong, "Merchants of Venice at Sparta in the 12th Century," *BSA* 16 (2009): 313–21; D. Jacoby, "Rural Exploitation and Market Economy in the Late Medieval Peloponnese," in Gerstel, *Viewing the Morea*, 213–75, at 233–45 (see above, n. 6).

116 I am very grateful to Evi Katsara for discussing unpublished archaeological finds from the acropolis with me. Only a very small area of the acropolis has been excavated. Among the finds are Italian imported ceramics. For a discussion of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century ceramics found in excavations of the Roman stoa, see G. Sanders, "Excavations at Sparta: The Roman Stoa, 1988–1991, Preliminary Report, Part 1: (c) Medieval Pottery," *BSA* 88 (1993), 251–86.

117 Waywell et al., "Excavations at Sparta," 412, no. 48.

118 Waywell et al., "Excavations at Sparta," 404–5.

119 The earliest painting in Mistra is found in the Church of St. Demetrios, dated 1272–1288, two decades after the completion of the Taxiarches. M. Chatzidakis, "Νεώτερα γιὰ τὴν ἱστορίαν καὶ τὴν τέχνη τῆς Μητροπόλεως τοῦ Μυστρά," *Δελτ. Χρυστ. Αρχ. Έτ.* 9 (1977–1979):

mention of a church of S. Nicolò in a legal document of 1168 indicates that the Venetian community was large enough to support a monastic foundation.¹²⁰ Moreover, Lakedaimon is mentioned several times in the *Chronicle of the Morea* as a center to which the crusaders gravitated and even settled.¹²¹ Given the skill of Sergios and Eustathios, it is conceivable that they took on commissions for resident Italians or Franks in Lakedaimon. Byzantine painters were commonly involved in the decoration of Latin churches and buildings in Elis, the Argolid, and elsewhere, melding Byzantine painting styles with Western subject matter.¹²²

143–79; S. Dufrenne, *Les programmes iconographiques des églises byzantines de Mistra* (Paris, 1970), 158; V. H. Torp, “A Consideration of the Wall-Paintings of the Metropolis at Mistra,” in *Interaction and Isolation in Late Byzantine Culture, Papers Read at a Colloquium Held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 1–5 December 1999*, ed. J. D. Rosenqvist (Uppsala, 2004), 70–88. Michalis Kappas attributes the painted decoration of several churches in neighboring Messenia to the patronage of the Villehardouin. See M. Kappas, “Cultural Interactions between East and West: The Testimony of Three Orthodox Monasteries in Thirteenth-Century Frankish Messenia,” in *Intercultural Encounters in Medieval Greece after 1204: The Evidence of Art and Material Culture*, Byzantios. Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization 19, ed. V. Foskolou and S. Kalopissi-Verti (Turnhout, 2022), 361–94.

120 Jacoby, “Rural Exploitation,” 235; S. Borsari, *Venezia e Bisanzio nel XII secolo: I rapporti economici*, Deputazione di storia patria per le Venezie, Miscellanea di studi e memorie 26 (Venice, 1988), 41 and n. 55. A document of May 1168 identifies “Iohannes Bono, monacho Sancti Nicolay in predicta Kedemonia. . . .” See R. Morozzo della Rocca and A. Lombardo, eds., *Documenti del commercio veneziano nei secoli XI–XIII* (Turin, 1940), 1: 203, no. 205. This document and a second concerning the disposition of a bequest (Morozzo della Rocca and Lombardo, *Documenti del commercio veneziano*, 204, no. 206), were signed on the same day by three individuals as well as a priest, Iacobus Calbo, who was also a notary.

121 According to the French *Chronicle*, “When the prince [William II] arrived at Lacedaimonia, he found the city empty of the people who were citizens and had inhabited the city. He was rather bothered about this. Consequently, he assigned their houses, lands and possessions to the Latins and the other Greeks still there.” A. Van Arsdall and H. Moody, trans., *The Old French “Chronicle of Morea”: An Account of Frankish Greece after the Fourth Crusade* (Farnham, 2015), 387.

122 See, for example, the decoration of the Church of St. Francis in Glarentza, published in D. Athanasoulis, “The Triangle of Power: Building Projects in the Metropolitan Area of the Crusader Principality of the Morea,” in Gerstel, *Viewing the Morea*, 111–51, at 124–25, and the so-called crusader gatehouse in Nauplion, published in M. Hirschbichler, “The Crusader Paintings in the Frankish Gate at Nauplia, Greece: A Historical Construct in the Latin Principality of Morea,” *Gesta* 54 (2005), 13–30 (with collected bibliography).

By tracing the steps of the painters Sergios and Eustathios across the landscape, what becomes clear is that the brothers had access to a number of painted monuments. What appears “Italianate” in the Gkoritsa paintings may, in fact, reflect what the painters saw in Lakedaimon and what they experienced through commissions elsewhere. The decoration of the church of the Taxiarches at Gkoritsa is the product of a region that engaged in long-distance trade with both Constantinople and Italy, on account of its abundant resources, and boasted a mixed population that managed and exploited those resources. In a sense, the Villehardouin and Nivelet were agents not of change, but of cultural expansion. In this reading, certain elements in the Church of the Taxiarches—the “Italianate” style of the archangels and the foregrounding of Mary Magdalene—are not “Western,” but part of the “international” climate that informed the work of the painters. Only one element, the applied cabochons, stands out as “foreign,” but this element can be explained if the painters took on commissions for those whose origins lay outside Lakonia. The presence of merchants from Venice in Lakedaimon provides one example of an unexpected clientele that may have had cause to interact with painters like Sergios and Eustathios.

Conclusion

The secure dating of the church of the Taxiarches at Gkoritsa encourages a reevaluation of undated painted cycles in northern Lakonia. This is significant. Sophia Kalopissi-Verti has wisely observed the proliferation of painted churches in Attica in the first half of the thirteenth century. The stylistic homogeneity of the monuments, she notes, “testifies to the activity of common workshops.”¹²³ The monuments in Attica are clustered

For a similar phenomenon on the island of Crete, see V. Foskolou, “Ζωγραφικά σύνολα λατινικής χορηγίας στον νότιο ελληνικό χώρο και τα νησιά (13ος–15ος αιώνας): Μια πρώτη προσέγγιση,” in *Grata Dona: Μελέτες προς τιμήν της Όλγας Γκράτζιου*, ed. T. Kiousopoulou and V. Foskolou (Heraklion, 2023), 603–32.

123 S. Kalopissi-Verti, “The Impact of the Fourth Crusade on Monumental Painting in the Peloponnese and Eastern Central Greece up to the End of the Thirteenth Century,” in *Byzantine Art in the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade: The Fourth Crusade and Its Consequences*, ed. P. Vocolopoulos (Athens, 2007), 63–104, at 85. See also N. Panselinou, “Επαρχιακό εργαστήριο ζωγραφικής που ανιχνεύεται από τον τοιχογραφικό διάκοσμο μνημείων του 13ου αιώνα στην Αττική,” in *Δώρον: Τιμητικός τόμος στον καθηγητή Νίκο Νικονάνο*, ed. G. Karadedos

around dated monuments, such as St. Peter in Kalyvia (1231/1232). In contrast, the absence of securely dated monuments in northern Lakonia has prevented a full accounting of artistic output in the early and mid-thirteenth century in this region. In this study, I have suggested that Sergios and Eustathios participated in the painting of churches in Amykles and at Gkoritsa and that they may have had a hand in the decoration of churches in Koumousta and Ayia Marina. It is possible, as well, that they may have contributed to the decoration of churches in Geraki. The decision to “refurbish from the foundations and redecorate” the church of the Taxiarches and commission the Stlavochorion painters was made by the donors Stephanos and Christina (see the inscription, p. 5). Reconstruction of the fourth line of the inscription provides sufficient space to add the title *kyr* before Stephanos’s name. If Stephanos was a member of the local elite, then he would have had the means to commission experienced painters to decorate a church of significance to his family.

(Thessaloniki, 2006), 169–76; S. Kalopissi-Verti, “Thirteenth-Century Painting in the Lordship of Athens: The Cases of Hagios Petros in Kalyvia Kouvara and the Omorphi Ekklesia at Galatsi; Some New Thoughts,” *Arte Medievale* 11 (2021), 59–78; V. Avramidis, “Οι υστεροβυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες δύο σχετικά άγνωστων μνημείων των Αχαρνών (Μενίδι): Η απόδοσή τους σε γνωστό ζωγραφικό εργαστήριο της Αττικής,” *Βυζαντινά Σύμμεικτα* 34 (2024): 189–250.

The Taxiarches, with its intricate decoration, was certainly not the first church that the brothers painted. Given the skill of their work, which also reveals an awareness of styles and techniques that arose from cultural convergences or exposure to forms of art that were not local to the region, it is likely that the painters took on commissions from both Orthodox and non-Orthodox clients. The cauldron for these interactions may have been Lakedaimon and, at some point, Mistra. Indeed, the later church of St. John in Gkoritsa manifests a sophisticated style of painting that may be associated with the latter center. A full understanding of the work of the painters from Stlavochorion must await the publication of the monuments cited in this study—churches in Ayia Marina, Geraki, Gkoritsa, Koumousta, and many others in northern Lakonia that have for far too long remained outside of any discussions about monumental painting in the mid-thirteenth century. The rich evidence provided by the Taxiarches inscription provides a starting point for such an investigation.

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Appendix

Epigraphical Commentary

The inscription is in uncial characters with some abbreviations. Some accents are indicated in the fresco. Many of the letters have serifs. The apex of alpha is topped by a horizontal extending left; the crossbar of alpha extends diagonally from the bottom left to center right. Beta is formed with two squarish boxes attached to the vertical hasta.¹ The horizontal of gamma often extends rightward to top adjacent vowels (iota, omega, eta) or, in two cases, consonants (gamma, rho). Lunate epsilon is narrow. Zeta is larger than other letters and curvilinear. Theta appears with and without serifs on the cross bar. Lambda is topped by a horizontal extending left. The letter mu has verticals at left and right and curvilinear interior strokes. The tail of xi descends below the baseline, requiring the scribe to diminish the height of the letters beneath it. The vertical hasta of rho has a small circle, occasionally a square, attached to its upper right. Lunate sigma is narrow. Tau has an extended horizontal with descending serifs. Phi has two small circles tangent to the central hasta. Psi has upwardly curved arms that begin below the midpoint of the vertical hasta. Stigma is formed from a tau with a small curved or squared lunate sigma connected to the horizontal at left.²

These letterforms are consistent throughout the church and are found on the labels identifying saints or narrative scenes and on the texts inscribed on scrolls and books held by evangelists and bishops (see Fig. 5 above).

Ligatures: νη (l. 1), τη (ll. 1, 4), αυ (4, 9, 10), ντ (5), ην (5, 10), της (7), γη (9)

Accents: acute accents on πάνσε[πτος], πανάγιος, Γαβριήλ, πόθου, ἐξόδου, σινζήγγ, Χρυσίν(α)ς, ἀρχαγγέλως, σ(υ)χώρ(η)σην, τιχούν(-), ἰσοριογράφου

Circumflex over penultimate letter indicating absence of terminal nu on l. 2: ἀρχαγγελῶ(ν), ταξιαρχῶ(ν); l. 4: αυτῶ(ν)

Superscript “C-shape” for sigma: l. 4: Χρυσίν(α)ς (with overline), l. 5: συχώ(ρ)υσην, l. 6: δεξιᾶς

Abbreviations: Μιχ(αήλ), Χ(ριστο)ῦ, κ(αί), ἰν(δικτιῶνος), Θ(εο)ῦ

Letters not on the baseline: superscript sigma (4, 6), superscript chi (3), inferior rho (9)

Line 1: ἀνεκενήστην = ἀνεκαινήστην; [ἀνεκ]ενήστην contains sigma and tau as separate letters and not a stigma, probably because the eta is attached to the vertical of the tau; βάθρον, fresco; βάθ<ρο>ν = βάθρων³

Line 2: ταξιαρχῶ(ν) = ταξιαρχώ(ν)

Line 3: Possibly [ν ἡμῶ]ν; the same abbreviation for Michael occurs in the representation of the Synaxis of the Archangels on the opposite wall.

Line 4: The title κυροῦ (κῡρ [genitive]) may precede [Στε] φάνου,⁴ which may be inscribed with a stigma; σινζήγγ (σύζυγος; spouse), common in Byzantine inscriptions, does not appear in published

1 For comparison, see the betas in the dedicatory inscription in Hagia Triada, Kranidi, dated 1244. Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions*, fig. 28 (see n. 35 above).

2 For a similar formation of the stigma in a mid-thirteenth-century church, see the text from Acts 1:11 inscribed on the east wall in St. John the Baptist in Kastania, Messenian Mani (personal observation). P. Drosogianni, *Σχόλια στίς τοιχογραφίες τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Προδρόμου στή Μεγάλη Καστάνια Μάνης* [Athens 1982], pl. II. Drosogianni dated the paintings in the church of St. John to the early thirteenth century. Kalopissi-Verti, however, has dated the frescoes to 1244–1265, that is, between the dates of the Church of Hagia Triada in Kranidi (1244) and Hagioi Anargyroi in Kepoula, Mani (1265). See Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions*, 65–66. I agree with Kalopissi-Verti’s assessment and view this church, which is not far from Tseria, as possibly related to the monuments described in this article.

3 Alternate spellings in churches in Lakonia include βαράθρον in St. Basil, Arkasades (1296), and βάθρων in the Phaneromeni *katholikon*, Dryalos, Mani (1322/23). See Feissel and Philippides-Braat, “Inventaires,” 320–21, 327–28 (see n. 102 above); Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions*, 81; Katsafados, *Βυζαντινές επιγραφικές μαρτυρίες*, 190 (see n. 29 above). See also N. A. Bees, “Die Wort βόθρος, βάραθρον = βάθρον in einer christlich-epigraphischen Formel,” *Glotta* 9 (1918): 109–12.

4 The title κῡρ appears in dedicatory inscriptions in two churches relatively close to Gkoritsa: St. Demetrios in Krokees (1286) (Diamanti, *Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου*, 34 [see n. 56 above]), and St. Basil at Arkasades (1296/97) (Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions*, 81). For the term, see A. Kontogiannopoulou, “Ἡ προσηγορία κυρ στή βυζαντινὴ κοινωνία,” *Βυζαντινά* 32 (2012), 209–26.

inscriptions from Lakonia, which favor variations of συμβία;⁵ τῷ(ν) τέκνον = τῷ(ν) τέκνων.

Line 5: ἐτοῦντες = αἰτοῦντες;⁶ ἀρχαγγέλου = ἀρχαγγέλου; φοβairā = φοβερᾶ; συχώ(ρ)υσην = συγχώρηση

Line 6: δικάη = δικαία; references to the Last Judgment appear in other inscriptions in the region.⁷

5 The closest parallel to συνζήγο is seen in the painting of 1290 in the narthex of Panagia Chrysaphitissa in Chrysapha, 9 km north of Gkoritsa, where the portrait of the female donor is labeled τῆς ὁμοζύγου α[ὐ]τοῦ Ζωῆς (his spouse, Zoe). See Rhoby, *Epigramme* 1: nos. 175.8, 248.6; A. Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein, Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung* 3, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Denkschriften der Philosophisch-Historischen Klasse, 474, Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung 35 (Vienna, 2014), nos. GR45.6, GR65.7, GR88.19, IT23.19, IT27.5, TR70.2, TR76.2, 22. For Panagia Chrysaphitissa in Chrysapha, see Drandakis, “Παναγία ἢ Χρυσάφτισσα (1290),” 343 (see n. 3 above); Albani, *Die byzantinischen Wandmalereien der Panagia Chrysaphitissa Kirche*, 27 (see n. 3 above); Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions*, 101. The term ὁμόζυγος is found in an inscription in the church of Panagia tou Arakos near Lagoudera in Cyprus (1192) (Rhoby, *Epigramme*, 1:224.6), and in Hagia Triada, Rethymnon, dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century (See G. Gerola, *Monumenti Veneti dell’isola di Creta* [Venice, 1932–1940], 4:478).

6 Forms of the verb αἰτέω are frequent in metrical donor inscriptions. See the index in Rhoby, *Epigramme* 1:419.

7 The wording recalls formulae in liturgical prayers, including the prayer behind the ambo. See S. Parenti and E. Velkovska, *L’euclologio Barberini gr. 336* (Omsk, 2011), 302: “αἰτοῦμεν τυχεῖν καὶ τῆς ἐκ δεξιῶν σου στάσεως ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ σου τῇ φοβερᾷ καὶ δικαίᾳ. . .” An inscription of 1278 at the center of the apse in the Church of the Archangel Michael in Polemitas, Mani, ends in minuscule letters, which P. Katsafados reads as καὶ συγχ(ω)ρυσον αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ φοβερᾷ καὶ ἀόρατῳ Κρισεῖ: Katsafados, *Βυζαντινὲς Επιγραφικὲς Μαρτυρίαι*, 38. An inscription (now lost) from 1304/1305 in the Palaiopanagia church near the village of Theologos once read κ(αὶ) συνχό[ρησον αὐτ]οῦ[ς] ἐν [ῆ]μέρᾳ κρίσεως; Feissel and Philippides-Braat, “Inventaires,” 327. A fourteenth-century inscription (now lost) in the church of Agios Strategos in Mariorema, on the outskirts of Geraki, states, Μνήσθητι Κ[ύριε τήν] ψυχὴν τοῦ [δούλου τοῦ] Θ(ε)οῦ Ἰγνατ[ίου] ηερομοναχοῦ Ἀνδρονᾶ τοῦ Λαρνακιότου κὲ κτήτο[ρο]ς τῆς Μον[ῆ]ς ταύτης κ(αὶ) [συ]γχόρησον [αὐ]τον ἐν ἡμ[έρ]ᾳ κρίσε[ως]; see Drandakis, “The Chapel of Ai-Strategos at Mariorema,” 225–26 (see n. 22 above). For discussion of a similar formula of the twelfth century in the church of

Line 7: The “region of the Peloponnesos” is mentioned in inscriptions in the churches of Hagioi Theodoroi, Kaphiona, Mani (1263–71), and St. George, Douraniko, Kythera (1275), as well as in the *Life* of St. Nikon;⁸ ΕΝΕΙΧΥΛΙΑCIN may refer to a date (6000) or a sum (6,000).

Line 9: Below the *epsilon* of Σεργίω is a *rho* turned on its side and backward; variant of Σθλαβοχώριον (see TLG, < Σκλαβοχώριον); for Σθλαβοχώριον (Sthlavochorion), see the *Testament* of Nikon Metanoiete.⁹

Line 10: Εὐσταθίου = Εὐσταθίου; ςψζς' = 6766 = 1258

Line 11: First word read as ψάλλοντας.

the Panagia Phorbiotissa at Asinou, Cyprus, which reads ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σε τι φρικώδη τῆς δίκης (ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σε τῇ φρικώδει τῆς δίκης), see A. Rhoby, “The Structure of Inscriptional Dedicatory Epigrams in Byzantium,” in *La poesia tardoantica e medievale, IV Convegno internazionale di studi Perugia, 15–17 novembre 2007: Atti in onore di Antonino Isola per il suo 70° genetliaco*, ed. C. Burini De Lorenzi and M. De Gaetano (Alessandria, 2010), 309–22, at 316–18; N. Ševčenko, “The Metrical Inscriptions in the Murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa,” in *Asinou across Time: Studies in the Architecture and Murals of Panagia Phorbiotissa, Cyprus*, ed. A. Carr and A. Nicolaïdēs (Washington, DC, 2012), 69–90, at 79–80 (the twelfth-century inscription was repainted in the fourteenth century).

8 For the church of Sts. Theodore, Kaphiona, dated to 1263–1271 (χώρα τῆς Πολλυπονίσου), see N. Drandakis, “Les peintures murales des Saints-Théodores à Kaphiona (Magne du Péloponnèse),” *CahArch* 32 (1984): 163–75; Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions*, 66–67; and V. Foskolou, “In the Reign of the Emperor of Rome . . .: Donor Inscriptions and Political Ideology in the Time of Michael VIII Paleologos,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έπ.* 27 (2006): 455–62, at 456–57. For St. George, Douraniko, Kythera, dated 1275 (+ πάσις τε Πέλοπος νήσου Γρηγό[ρ]ιος), see Chatzidakis and Bitha, *Kythera*, 140 (see n. 100 above). For the *Life* of St. Nikon (πάσας τὰς ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ Πέλοπος νήσῳ χώρας), see Sullivan, trans., *The Life of St. Nikon*, 58.14 (see n. 115 above).

9 The term σθλαβοχωρίου is found in the edition of 1646, which was published by S. Lampros, “Ο βίος Νίκωνος τοῦ Μετανοεῖτε,” *NE* 3 (1906): 129–228, at 223–28. For the Greek text, see Lampsidis, *Ο εκ Πόντου ὁσιος Νίκων*, 255, 446–47, 453, 461, 477 (see n. 48 above). For an English translation, see Bandy, “Nikon Metanoiete,” 1:318, 319 (see n. 50 above).